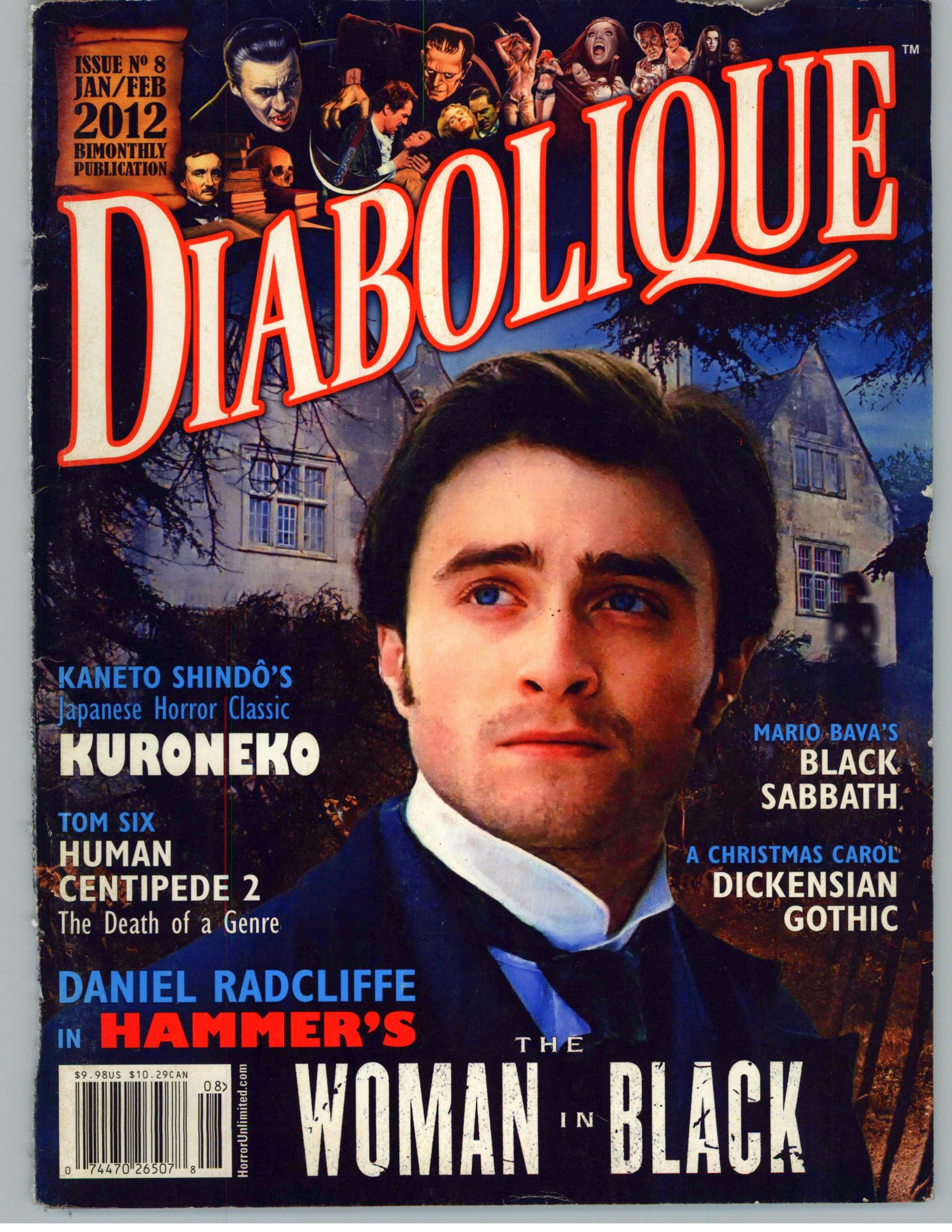
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Boris Karloff in Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963)

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Issue № 8
Jan/Feb, 2012

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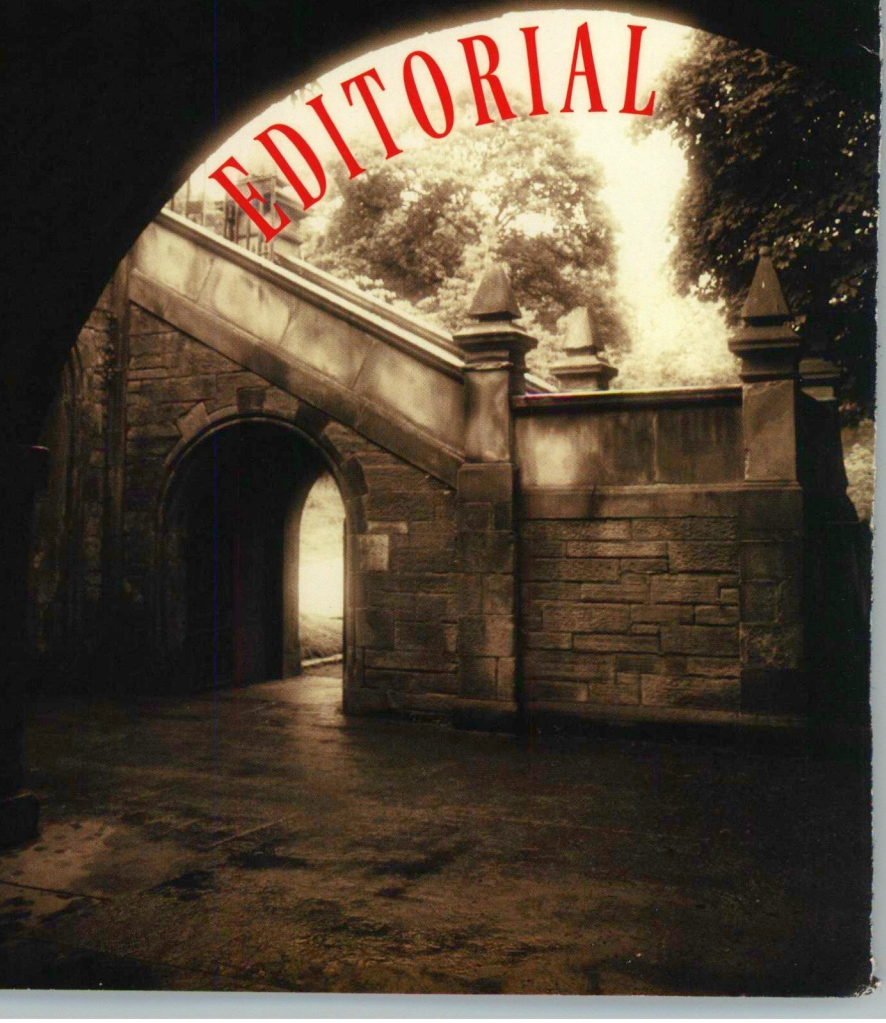

OVER THE LAST few weeks we've been debating the merits of *Human Centipede 2* (*HC2*), something which has spilled over into this very issue. I hold my hand up and confess I didn't care much for it—the first film didn't do a whole lot for me, and the second even less. But the controversy here in the UK with the outright banning of the film by the censors (don't kid yourself that BBFC means something other than 'censor'), issuing of a detailed press release, and subsequent furore has ensured that *HC2* is getting a continuous blast of publicity.

Praise where praise is due however, Laurence R Harvey is simply outstanding as the deeply unpleasant lead in *HC2*, and no doubt will become a familiar genre face in the future. With that in mind, Adrian Smith spoke to him recently for *Diabolique*. Hard to believe that us 30-something Brits would recognise him from kids tv!

Adrian has also been talking to director Ruggero Deodato, following the recent UK Blu-ray release of *Cannibal Holocaust*, another nasty that had me reconsidering my bowl of rice crispies. *Cannibal* is still cut here in the UK, with the images of real-life animal cruelty being deemed a step too far by our cinematic moral guardians. But thanks to Shameless Screen Entertainment we are at least given the chance to make up our own minds about it. I'm too young to remember the era of the video nasties proper, but I am old enough to remember when *The Exorcist* and *A Clockwork Orange* were banned in the UK, and issues of cinematic censorship in today's era of a global village, with everything accessible online, are never far away.

As this issue goes to press, we've just had the first snow of winter here in the UK, and with evenings encroaching earlier and earlier, it's time to bring out the eggnog and the complete M.R. James, and indulge in the ancient Christmas traditions of sharing ghost stories. With that in mind, most of the rest of this issue is very much caught up in the supernatural.

Susan Hill's chilling novel *The Woman In Black* has just been re-released in a gorgeous hardback edition from Profile Books, and some of the woodcut illustrations by Andy English (www.andy-english.com) accompany our coverage of the various incarnations of the story in book, stage and screen. You've just got time to buy a copy before Hammer's new film comes out in February. Never has expectation been so high for the Hammer brand. Raymond Cummings makes a return to the mag with his piece inspired by his first experience of the play while I mull over the television and film adaptations.

Jay McRoy meanwhile, celebrates *Kuroneko*, one of the finest Japanese ghost stories ever committed to celluloid. If you've never seen one of Kaneto Shindō's films, I strongly recommend you check them out (either from Eurkea in the UK, or Criterion in the US).

And David L. Rattigan pays tribute to that quintessential winter ghost tale, *A Christmas Carol*, as well as the work of composer Franz Liszt. To my shame, I really know very little about Liszt bar what I learned in the late Ken Russell's *Lisztomania*—and I'm pretty sure that wasn't entirely factual!

After this issue we've reached a consensus here at the *Diabolique* team, that in future, unless we have very good exception to do so, we will not be publishing on titles not yet released. We've always aimed to be objective and informed, and the advance publicity stages of a film are not the time to do that. That may mean on occasion we're a little behind, but there's always the *Diabolique* podcast and website. We're also upping our coverage on the other arts. We've slipped into becoming a very film-centred publication, and that was never meant to be the case. As always your thoughts on this, and anything else to do with the magazine are welcome. Addresses are on the previous page.

Robert J.E. Simpson
Editor

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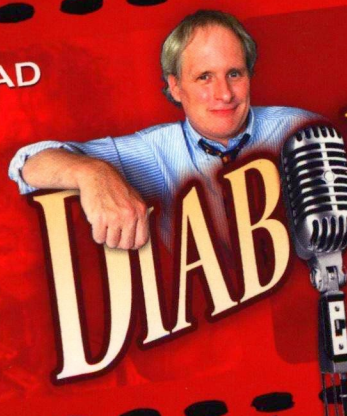

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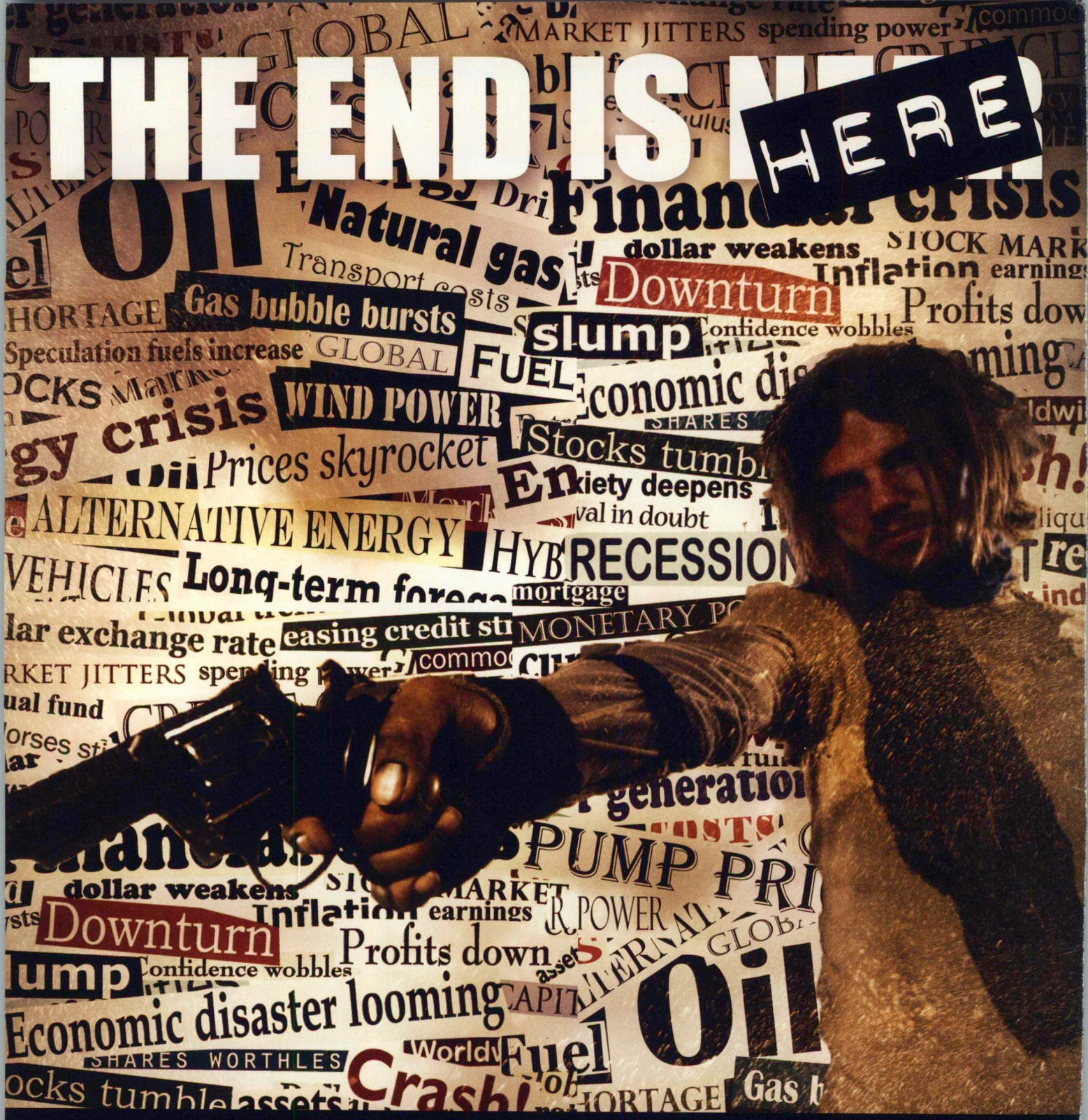

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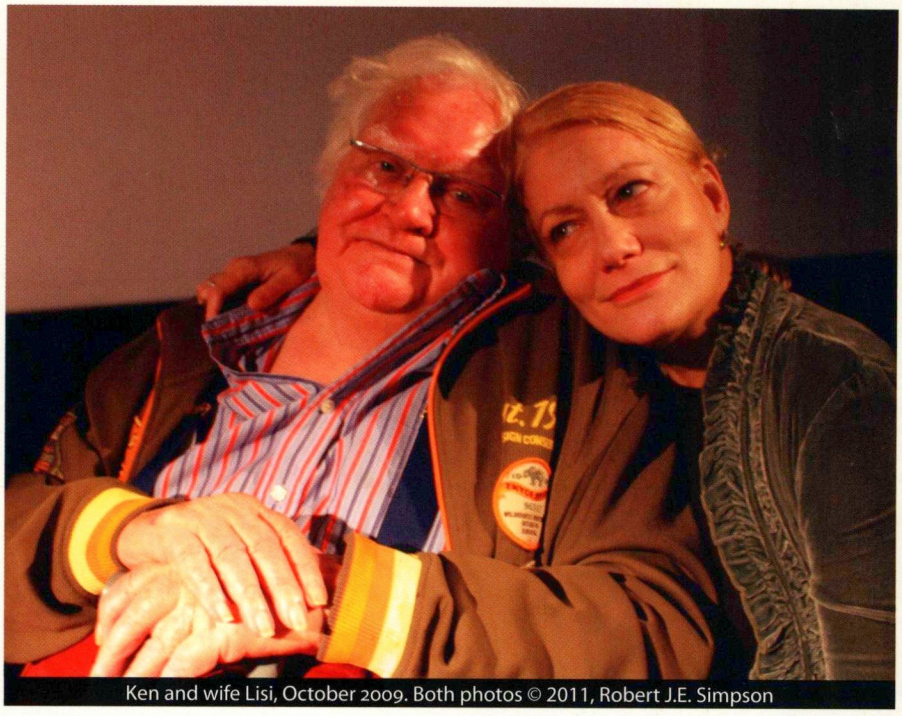
FAREWELL, KEN RUSSELL (1927-2011)

In the latter years of his life Ken Russell described himself as a 'garagiste'—his way of saying he made films in the large garage at his house in the New Forest in England.

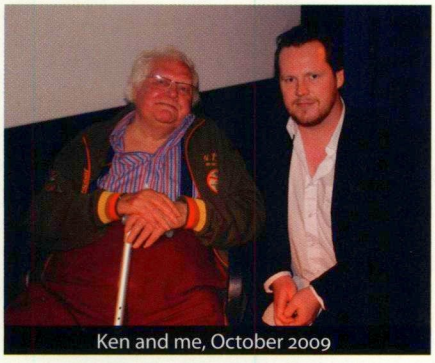
DESPITE BEING ONE of the most inventive British film directors of the 20th century, his perceived eccentricity and the 'difficult' nature of his films and working methods, meant that funding became harder to come by for the director and in time his commercial work dried up.

And yet, while commercial success eluded him, creativity did not, and right until his last day Ken continued to work on his various projects, often from the comfort of his own home. Just a couple of weeks before his death the British news outlets were being worked into a minor frenzy with the news that the BFI were finally giving his 1971 classic *The Devils* an overdue DVD release. For a man supposedly shunned by the industry it appears he still had a legion of supporters.

Ken Russell was a unique talent in British cinema. A visionary of the highest order, it could be argued that even a bad Ken Russell project was worth wading through. His visuals had been honed during an early stint as a documentary photographer for the likes of *Picture Post*, and a directing career at the BBC. During the 1960s he was in constant work for *Monitor* and *Omnibus*, moving beyond factual documentaries into docu-drama, pushing at the conventions of the time and 'discovering' the actor Oliver Reed.



Ken and wife Lisi, October 2009. Both photos © 2011, Robert J.E. Simpson



Ken and me, October 2009

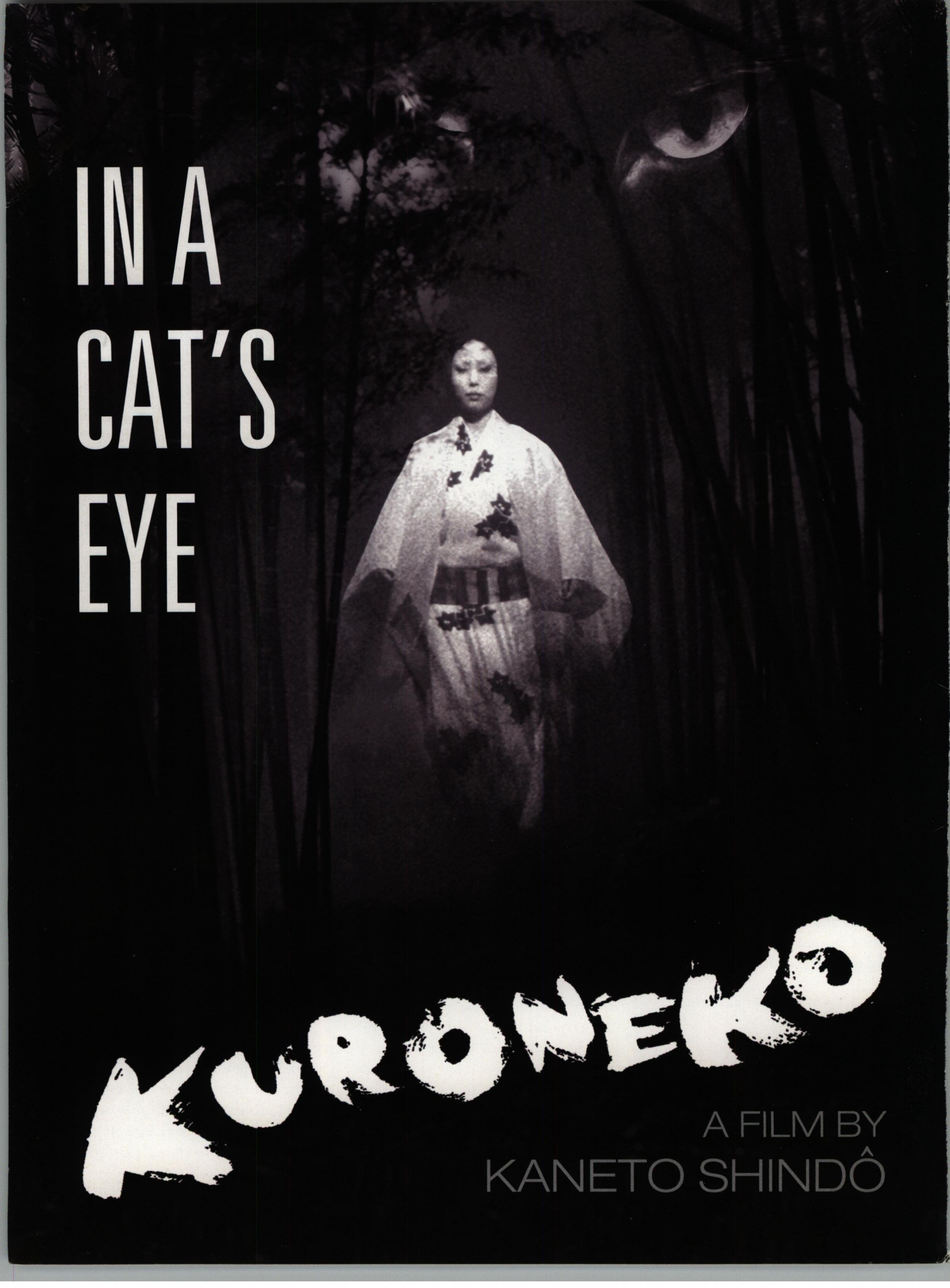
Reed would become a friend and a regular collaborator, and during the 1970s, Ken's name became linked with the groups of British 'hellraisers'—Reed, Keith Moon, Richard Harris et al. He earned his moniker 'enfant terrible' with *Woman In Love* (infamous for its full-frontal nude wrestling scene between Oliver Reed and Alan Bates), and *The Devils*—a deeply disturbing film that has never been released in its entirety. Popular attention was gained through his continuing work with musically inspired plots including The Who's *Tommy*, and *Liztomania*.

During the 1980s he moved further into darker subjects, including *Altered States*, *Gothic* and *Lair of the White Worm*—genre films that divided audiences. But by the 1990s Ken was a largely forgotten figure. Denied access to cinema audiences, he found an outlet once again in television including a controversial adaptation of *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and regular contributions to his old *Monitor* collaborator Melvyn Bragg's *The South Bank Show*. But it would be his brief stint in Channel 4's *Big Brother* in 2007 that brought him back to the attention of the British public.

Long sidelined as an out-of-touch eccentric, the passing of director Ken Russell was met with almost universal acclaim in the British newspapers, and largely ignored outside of the country. Ken had been ill for some time and had suffered a number of strokes recently. According to his wife Lisi, the last film he watched was *Donnie Darko*—as fitting as anything.

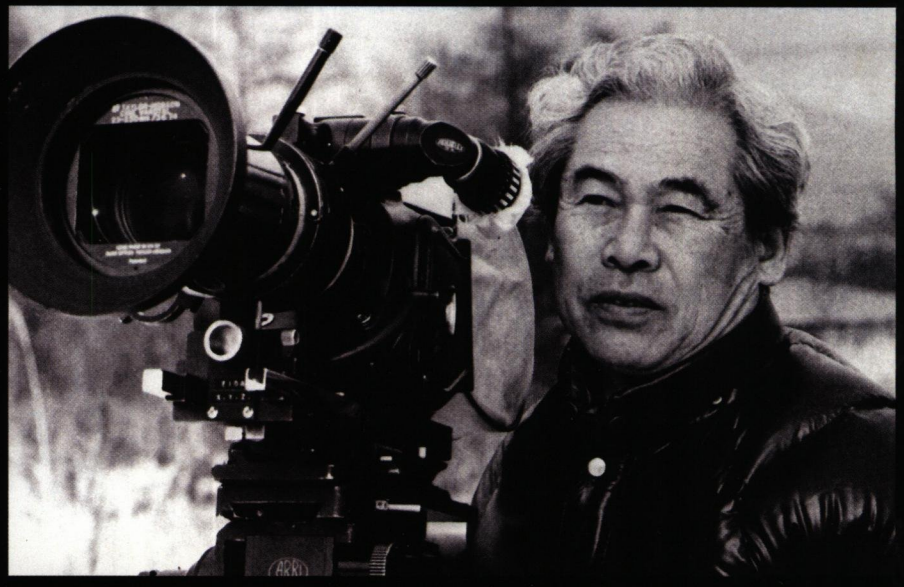
Ken's output included film, photography, television, theatre and the written word. He pushed boundaries and left us with at least two genuine classics in *Woman In Love* and *The Devils*. He was a gifted talent, a challenging creative, and a brilliant mind. In everything, Ken broke the mould.

RJES


IN A
CAT'S
EYE
KURONEKO
A FILM BY
KANETO SHINDÔ

Recent DVD and Blu-ray releases of Kaneto Shindô's *Kuroneko* (1968) by highly esteemed labels Masters of Cinema (UK, 2006) and The Criterion Collection (USA, 2011) provide an opportunity for audiences who, familiar with the proliferation of contemporary "J-horror" films over the last two decades, wish to (re)acquaint themselves with one of Japanese horror cinema's most groundbreaking works.

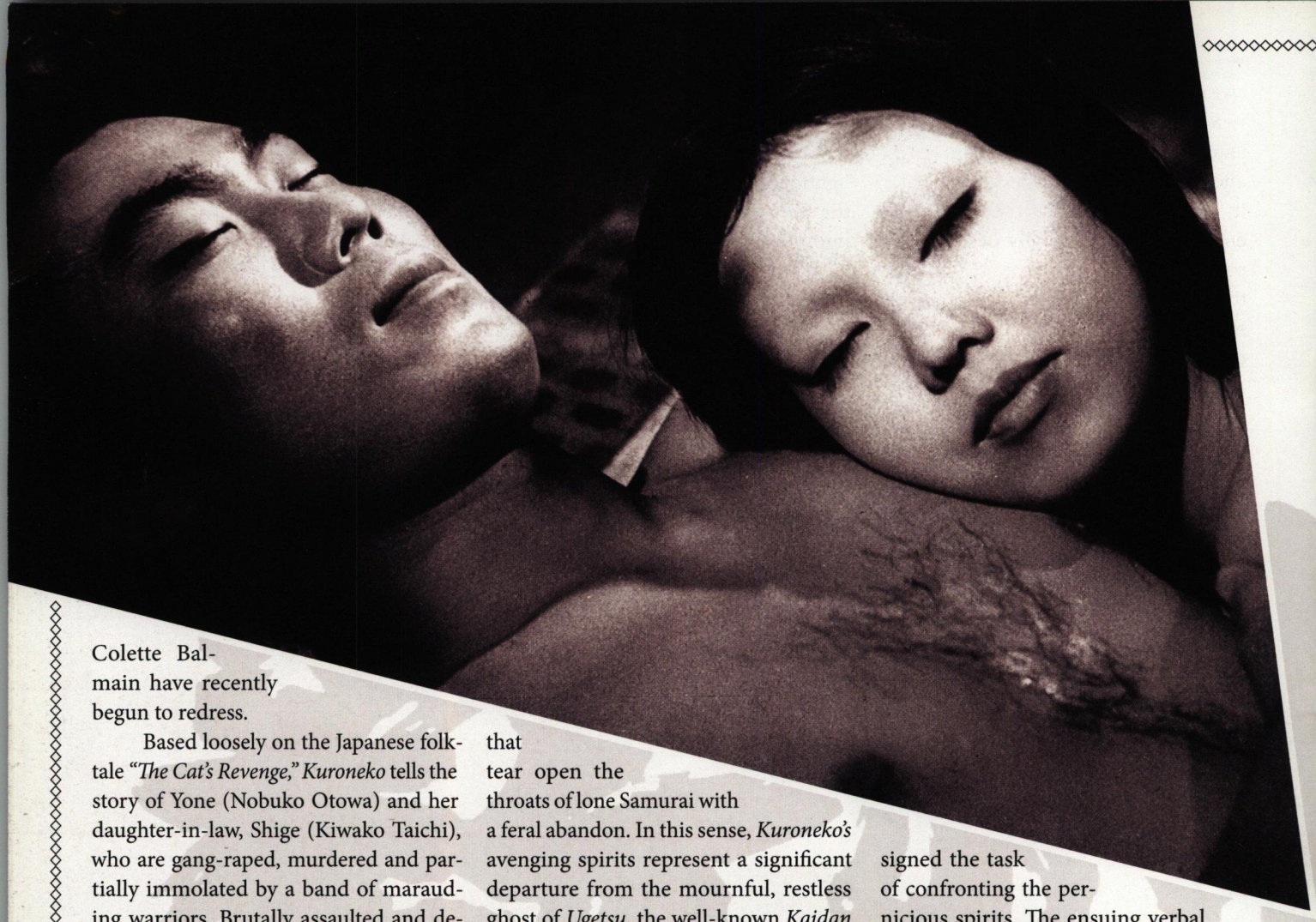
A BEAUTIFULLY WROUGHT MÉLANGE of chiaroscuro lighting, experimental cinematography, eclectic editing, and performances heavily inflected by Kabuki and Nōh theatrical conventions, *Kuroneko* not only challenges simple genre classifications, but also anticipates the reimagining of the onryō (avenging spirit) that many film viewers have come to associate with works like Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* films (1998-2005) and Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on* cycle (2000 - 2006). *Kuroneko*, in other words, is far from a simple, by-the-numbers genre exercise. Helmed by a visionary director who elected to create his own production company rather than compromise his aesthetic vision, *Kuroneko* follows the corporeal and spectral travails of two brutally violated women, whose posthumous compulsion for exacting bloody retribution functions as a cultural barometer for considerations of national, sexual, gendered and class identities. Such inequities are every bit as pertinent today as they were in the 1968, or, for that matter, the Sengoku Period (mid 15th to early 17th century), during which the film's action is set.



Kaneto Shindô

Following the success of *The Naked Island* (1961) and *Onibaba* (1964), *Kuroneko* further bolstered the impressive catalogue of films emerging from Kindai Eiga Kyōkai studios, the fledgling, independently-funded production company Kaneto Shindō established with fellow director Kozaburo Yoshimura. The pair had recently quit Shōchiku Studios to pursue projects that the more established motion picture industry was hesitant to finance. The creation of Kindai Eiga Kyōkai studios was a fiscal gambit that periodically teetered on the precipice of financial collapse. However, it was also a profound testament to Shindō's artistic integrity and willingness to risk his own economic welfare to direct cinematic texts that not only entertained, but also engaged creatively with socio-political issues he considered particularly relevant. *Kuroneko* likewise marks Shindō's return to the horror genre just four years after the success of *Onibaba* [see box-out, Ed], the film with which *Kuroneko* is frequently paired. The oft-noted affinity between these works is by no means unwarranted. In each text two isolated women (a mother and a daughter-in-law) prey upon samurai with a zeal sustained by a history of oppression and dispossession. Linking these films too directly, however, risks reducing the respective works to mere variations on a theme and, consequently, fails to appreciate each text on its own merits.

Kuroneko was denied the international exposure it may have well received had the 1968 Cannes Film Festival not been cancelled following Jean-Luc Godard's, François Truffaut's and Louis Malle's highly publicized pleas for solidarity with the striking workers and protesting students in Paris. It has, therefore, for too long remained under-examined by film scholars—a dearth of consideration that critics such as Maitland McDonagh and



Colette Balmain have recently begun to redress.

Based loosely on the Japanese folktale *"The Cat's Revenge," Kuroneko* tells the story of Yone (Nobuko Otowa) and her daughter-in-law, Shige (Kiwako Taichi), who are gang-raped, murdered and partially immolated by a band of marauding warriors. Brutally assaulted and degraded, they return as ethereal hybrid entities that recall classic representations of the onryō, virulent ghostly figures that have long been a staple of Kabuki productions. Adorned in funereal, white, flowing kimonos, with meticulously powdered and made-up faces framed by dark black hair, their spirits vacillate between enacting stylized performances of an idealized, quasi-aristocratic femininity and assuming the shape of grotesquely anthropomorphic felines that tear open the throats of lone Samurai with a feral abandon. In this sense, *Kuroneko's* avenging spirits represent a significant departure from the mournful, restless ghost of *Ugetsu*, the well-known *Kaidan* (ghost story) directed by Kaneto Shindō's mentor, Kenji Mizoguchi. As Yone and Shige's attacks escalate in number and frequency, Gintoki, a young and resourceful peasant-turned-samurai, is assigned the task of confronting the pernicious spirits. The ensuing verbal and tactical exchanges between Gintoki, Shige, and Yone result in a series of bleak, often heartbreaking misrecognitions and discoveries that renders *Kuroneko* every bit as poignant as it is unsettling and frightening.

Much of *Kuroneko's* impact results from the diverse tonalities evoked through Shindō's meticulous mise-en-scène. Luscious, award-winning cinematography (lensed by Kiyomi Kuroda), daring post-production image manipulation and audacious editing contribute mightily to the exten-

sive range of affect discernable within *Kuroneko*. Shindō's stylistic bravado is most apparent in the dreamlike fugue of melancholy and menace suffusing the majority of the narrative. But these eerie, and emotionally and visually destabilizing passages would not be remotely as effective were they not preceded by an opening sequence steeped in the conventions of classic continuity editing (eg, establishing shots, eye-line matches, a "rhetoric" of shot-reverse-shot) and, importantly, bracketed by extreme long shots of considerable duration. In the first of these, a band of warriors emerge from a densely wooded region to invade Yone and Shige's humble rural abode. In the latter comparably composed long shot, the warriors emerge sporadically from the house in which Yone and Shige now lay dead, cross an empty expanse of land, and eventually disappear one by one into the distant forest. As the last assailant vanishes into the foliage, a plume of smoke emerges from the soon-to-be-raised domestic-realm-turned-banal-tomb.

It is in the sequences during which the ghostly apparitions commune directly with the living, however, that Kaneto Shindō most explicitly veers *Kuroneko* towards an impressionistic theatricality that evokes Kabuki and Nōh traditions without ever breaking away from a visual logic grounded firmly within the art of cinema. Double-exposures and inventive, virtually seamless split-screens allow for the depiction of a world literally unmoored from the spatial and temporal "laws" that demarcate the mortal sphere from the realm of the dead. Characters move about one another like dancers gracefully pirouetting and weaving on a stage, but Shindō's direction and deliberate framing disallows the optical promiscuity afforded spectators at a play. Despite the presence of overtly theatrical conceits, Shindō's compositions consist only of what he wants us to see. Deliberately expressive spotlighting illuminates precise portions of the frame while casting the remainder into inky shadow; backgrounds appear to float behind foregrounded action, a mechanical distortion resulting in the portrayal of a world at odds with itself. In these moments, the terrestrial plane is rendered as artificial as it is representational. Accentuated by Hikaru Hayashi's percussive score, these hybrid moments, with their virtuosic convergence of styles and tropes, recall the spectral women's radical alterity—an otherness that combines the "'*Kaidan*,' or ghost story, with the 'demonic woman' conceit of 'Nōh … and Kabuki … [theatrical] tradition.'"[1]

Consequently, locating *Kuroneko* within a wider continuum of Japanese horror cinema is a process as compelling as it is challenging. Although the vengeance Yone and Shiga enact reminds viewers of the rancorous onryō, the phantasmatic fusion of the (post)human with the feline suggests motifs most frequently associated with the bakeneko-mono (ghost-cat story), a Japanese horror convention evidenced in films such as *Black Cat Mansion* (Nobuo Nakagawa, 1958) and *The Ghost of Otama Pond* (Yoshihiro Ishikawa, 1960). One can even make the argument for understanding *Kuroneko* as a prototype of sorts for the emerging rape-revenge genre in world cinema. Yet even here one must be cautious, for unlike films such as Meir Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) and Takashi Ishii's *Freeze Me* (2000), the violence visited upon travelling Samurai not responsible for the women's demise antedates more contemporary iterations of the displaced/expansive aggression within the rape-revenge tradition, as depicted in works like Abel Ferrara's *Ms. 45* (1981) and Coralie Virginie Despentes' *Baise Moi* (2000).

What's more, Shindō synthesizes overtly theatrical trappings with conventional Japanese horror tropes. Natural landscapes have a poetic impact rather than a simply expository effect, as do the stylized portrayals of Yone and Shige's often erotic and largely indiscriminate reprisals (they attack only men).

Through these directorial choices, Shindō undermines mimesis in favor of a mode of cinematic presentation that allows for a remarkably expansive social critique. As Collette Balmain posits, by refusing to contain Yone's and Shige's wrath "to those who have committed the offense against them," their rage confronts the nexus of gender biases and power imbalances inherent within "Japanese paternalism as a whole."[2] Without the protection of Yone's son (Shige's husband), and geographically isolated on a patch of land surrounded by a wild expanse of thick bamboo, the women are in a precarious position. Though they struggle against the warriors' libidinous assaults, they are easily overpowered. Additionally, unlike the marauding soldiers who seem conspicuously at odds with their immediate environment (they clumsily hack their way through the vegetation and throw themselves onto the edge of a small stream in a desperate attempt to quench their thirst), Shindō depicts Yone and Shige, in both their living and undead manifestations, as far more acclimated to the natural world. This association is made all the more salient via the correlation of their ghostly incarnations with the predatory skills and sleek grace of the black cat, a mischievous trickster figure in Japanese folklore and the only living being we see being the least bit attentive to the women's violated and partially incinerated corpses. As humans, Yone and Shige can glean enough food during a time of famine to feed themselves; as spirits, they move effortlessly in the utter darkness of the bamboo forest at night, leaping acrobatically as if carried by the wind and effortlessly guiding the travelling samurai upon which they prey through a dense arboreal labyrinth.

Though it may be a bit of an overstatement to label Shindō a feminist filmmaker or to describe *Kuroneko* as a film predominantly concerned with the plight of women in a phallocentric culture, Yone and Shige are sympathetic characters victimized by an aggressive masculinity that objectifies them and ultimately deems them disposable. In this sense, Shindō's sensitivity to women's subjugation elicits further comparisons with Kenji Mizoguchi, whose films such as *The Lady of Masashino* (1951), *The Life of Oharu* (1952), *Ugetsu* (1953), and *Shansho the Bailiff* (1954) variably take sexual inequality as a primary theme. The prejudices that sustain social hierarchies and their ideological underpinnings, however, are rarely singular or easily reducible, and the social critique Shindō advances in *Kuroneko* foregrounds injustices that are systemic and trans-historical. By perpetu-

ally compromising the immersive verisimilitude that setting his Kabuki and Nōh inflected film in the Early Sengoku period might offer, Shindō's hyper-stylized flourishes position Kuroneko as a narrative that requires its viewers to read the film as a work that exceeds any pretenses towards historical specificity. An era of persistent political upheaval and social instability that lasted until the commencement of the Edo period and the rise of the Tokugawa shogunate, the Sengoku period's cultural volatility, marked by radical inequality and a plurality contesting political agendas, would resonate with Japanese—and international—filmgoers of the late 1960s. Given the tumultuous transformations occurring around the globe, audiences would undoubtedly recognize aspects of the Sengoku period's cultural turbulence within their own immediate political climate. In this sense, Koruneko is a film that has as much, if not more, to say about the (inter)national climate of 1968 as it is about 1468. Likewise, if the enthusiasm with which cinephiles have embraced the film's recent commercial release is any indicator, the unrest and frustration that accompanied the myriad social upheavals of the late 1960s still resonates in the early 21st century, where economic divisions in many nations are more extreme than ever.

Class disparity and the structures of domination and exploitation that accompany such divisions deeply inform Shindō's cinema—especially genre pieces like Onibaba and Kuroneko. A socialist by his own admission, Shindō shared his continued aversion to class injustice in a recent interview with Joan Mellen:

> I wish to describe the struggles of the so-called common people, which usually never appears in received history … [You] must experience everything with a sense of the political struggle between classes.3

Like the bamboo forest through which the violated women's spectral remainders snake and weave in search of wayward samurai, peasants like Yone and Shige, Shindō suggests, are at once omnipresent and, for all intents and purposes, invisible—especially to those whose financial acumen and social power allow them to overlook the suffering of others. Yone and Shige, then, are emblematic of the voiceless masses that suffer at the whims of the ruling elite. For Shindō, even the eponymous black cat, whose lithe movements and haunting eyes contribute to some of the film's most powerful and enduring images, carries an allegorical weight that extends beyond its immediate cultural connection with roguish attitudes: "I like the idea of using the cat," Shindō states in the Mellen interview, "because I could thus express the very low position in society which certain people occupy." In a society stratified along sex and class divisions, and in which an affluent few wield great power while an overwhelming majority scramble to divvy up the scant remainders, it should come as no surprise when human beings are forced to scavenge like beasts. It is exactly in the face of the extreme disparity that artists must interrogate the very attitudes and preconceptions that underscore such cultural logics.

Political critiques in the arts, no matter how embedded within complex narratological configurations or overshadowed by bold aesthetic practices, inevitably encounter resistance. In the case of Kaneto Shindō's cinema, Donald Richie, one of the most revered and prolific critics of Japanese cinema, has remarked: "the party line is never completely invisible and any audience feels manipulated when the purpose of the director becomes this noticeable."4 While it can be argued that Richie ultimately overstates his allegations regarding the transparency of the progressive cultural critiques within Shindō's films, Kuroneko's continued appeal to contemporary audiences indicates that Yone and Shige's sufferings still resonate with viewers some forty-plus years following the turbulent historical moment during which it was released.

Whether they find themselves drawn almost exclusively to the film's most discernable genre conventions, or whether they are moved by those uncanny if heartrending sequences during which the closest of familial relations fail to recognize each other when separated by class and corporeal difference, audiences who experience (or re-experience) Kaneto Shindō's underrated work of dread and sorrow will come away transformed. And, in a global climate in which even the most established practitioners of so-called "independent" cinema are hesitant to challenge the status quo, this is no small task.

by Jay McRoy
University of Wisconsin

1. Linnie Blake, "'Everyone Will Suffer': National Identity and the Spirit of Subaltern Vengeance in Nakata Hideo's Ringu and Gore Verbinski's The Ring," in Monstrous Adaptations: Generic and Thematic Mutations in Horror Film, ed. Richard J Hand & Jay McRoy (Manchester University Press, 2007), 214
2. Colette Balmain, Introduction to Japanese Horror Film (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 75
3. Joan Mellen, "'My Mind Was Always on the Commoners': Shindō on Kuroneko in His Body of Work," in Currents, The Criterion Collection, October 28, 2011, http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/2026-my-mind-was-always-on-the-commoners-shindo-on-kuroneko-in-his-body-of-work
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乙羽信子
吉村実子
佐藤慶
殿山泰司
宇野重吉

田中筆子　荒谷甫水　加地健太郎　松本染升
吉田道紀　島影伸子　山口博義　田中浩　宇仁貫三

新藤兼人　脚本・監督

製作・絲屋寿雄・能登節雄・湊保　撮影・黒田清巳　美術・新藤兼人　給配東宝・近代映協・東京映画提携作品
録音・大橋鉄矢　照明・菱沼誉吉　音楽・林光

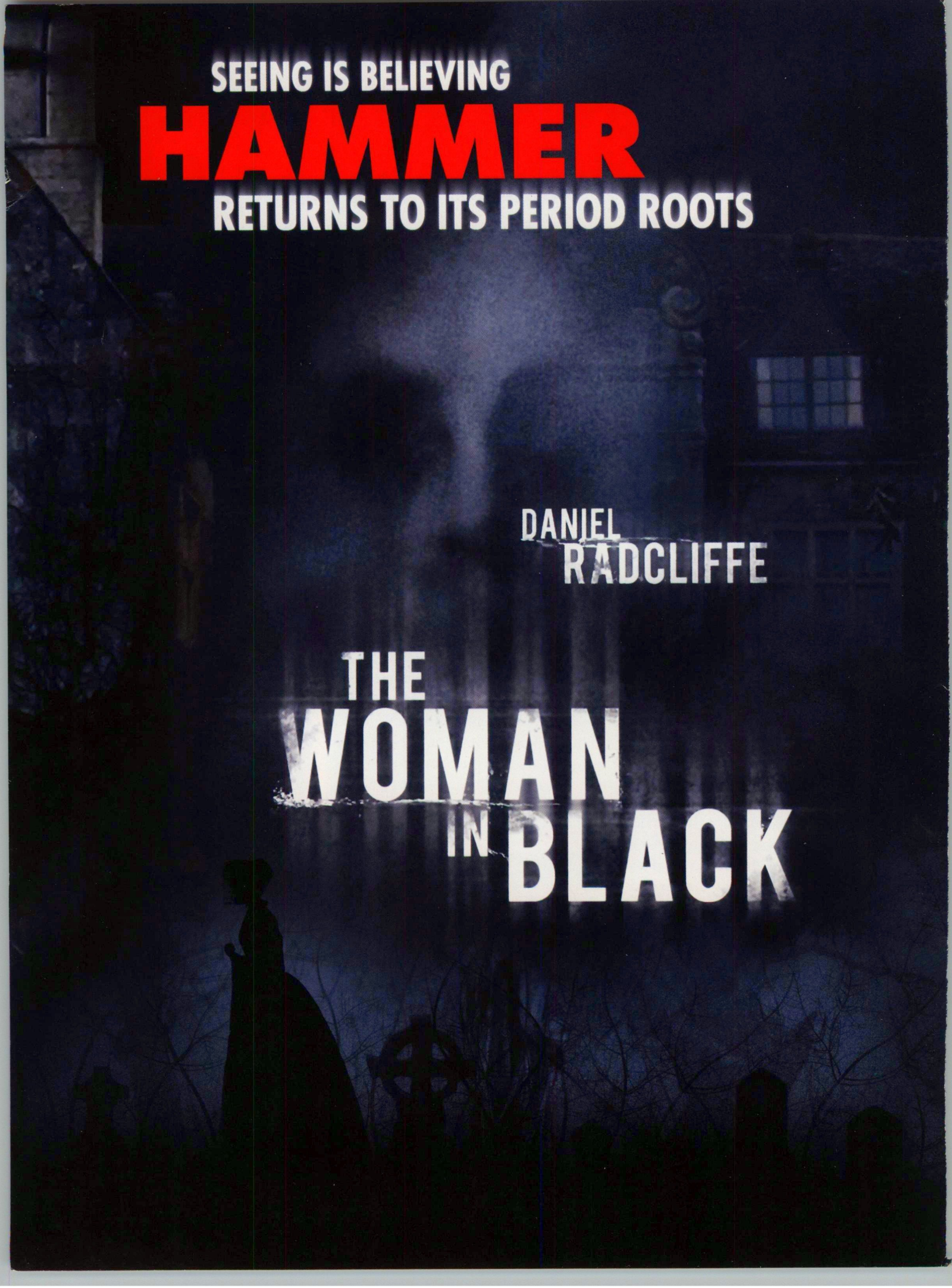
KANETO SHINDÔ and ONIBABA

KANETO SHINDŌ HAS long been one of cinema's most prolific filmmakers, having directed over 40 features and penned more than 140 scripts in a career spanning seven decades. He worked closely with legendary filmmaker Kenji Mizoguchi on *Flame of My Love* (1949), and is often described by film scholars as a vital forerunner to renowned Japanese New Wave directors like Shôhei Imamura (*Vengeance is Mine* [1979], *Black Rain* [1989] and *The Eel* [1997]) and Nagisa Ôshima (*Cruel Story of Youth* [1960], *In the Realm of the Senses* [1976], and *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* [1983]). It is arguably, however, for his one of his most unsettling masterpieces, *Onibaba* (1964), a disturbing examination of human desire in its darkest manifestations, that Shindō is perhaps best-known among horror aficionados. Prior to *Kuroneko's* release on Blu-ray and DVD, *Onibaba* was one of THE most important and influential J-horror films of the post-war years. To this day, *Onibaba* continues to win over most die-hard horror fans and haunts the memories of those who cannot shake its powerful imagery.

Based loosely on a Buddhist parable and set during the 16th century, *Onibaba* tells the story of a mother and her daughter-in-law who, in order to survive during a time of protracted civil war, murder samurai unlucky enough to wander into their seemingly inviting realm of swaying susuki grass. The women, isolated from society, loot their victims' bodies, selling the stolen armor for food upon which they gorge themselves with awho n unnerving sensual abandon. A thought-provoking work of disquieting beauty and unfettered eroticism, *Onibaba* challenges viewers to consider human beings as creatures that, under the right circumstances, are just as likely to be driven to the edge of sanity and beyond by overwhelming desires to possess and consume as they are to show kindness towards their neighbors. It is ultimately the fertile moments between these seeming polarities that Shindō finds most interesting. In this sense, the women in *Onibaba* are at once both a dread-inducing couple behave in extreme and occasionally monstrous way, and desperate survivors struggling within and against a hierarchical and patriarchal culture grounded upon an ideology that privileges masculine dominance and military power. These systemic conditions reinforce the women's location at society's periphery. Whether contemporary viewers come away from *Onibaba* understanding its premise as pessimistic or chillingly honest, Shindō's film possesses an undeniable dramatic power.

In keeping with the motion picture's motifs of avaricious devouring and an equally voracious desire to possess and manipulate another, two particularly disturbing images emerge as so essential to the work's tone that they transcend the emblematic to become iconographic. The first is the depiction of the potentially bottomless pit into which the mother and daughter-in-law toss the corpses of the men they kill. Located deep within a sea of tall swaying grass, the hole's impenetrably dark opening, like a timeless, gaping maw in the earth itself, becomes the ultimate symbol not only of humanity's unregulated consumption, but of death in the midst of life. The second image virtually guaranteed to resonate with viewers is the figure of the mother struggling vainly to remove the horrific demon mask she dons in an attempt to frighten her daughter-in-law into abandoning her suitor and remaining by her side. Similarly powerful images permeate Kaneto Shindō's filmography, making him one of the most important visual artists in world cinema.

by Jay McRoy
University of Wisconsin


SEEING IS BELIEVING
HAMMER
RETURNS TO ITS PERIOD ROOTS
DANIEL
RADCLIFFE
THE
WOMAN
IN
BLACK

When Hammer announced that they were to produce a big-screen adaptation of Susan Hill's ghost story *The Woman In Black*, critics and fans alike voiced their unanimous approval.

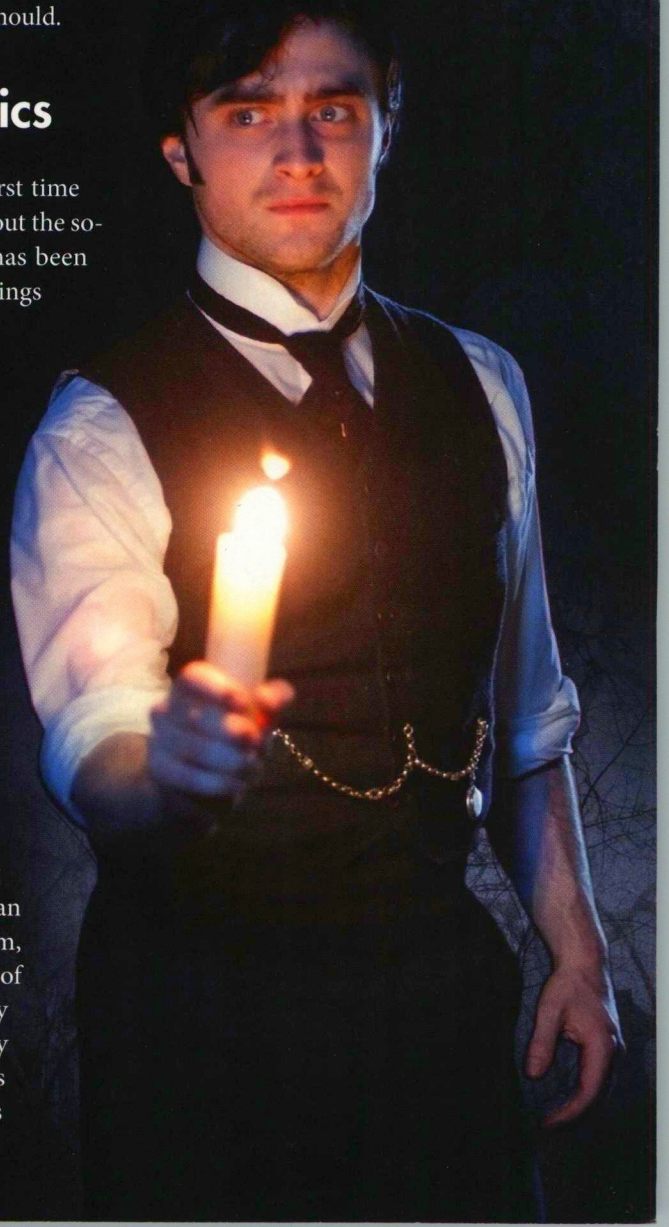
THE PERIOD GOTHIC trappings of the chilling narrative resonate with those who think of Hammer as primarily a producer of Victorian gothic horror films. That this is also the first major onscreen role for Daniel Radcliffe following the end of the Harry Potter series ensures that even the tabloid newspapers are following proceedings with some interest.

At the time of writing we are still some three months away from the film's release and our appetites have been well and truly whetted by the trailers which have been issued via the internet. Radcliffe is visibly older than his Harry Potter alter ego, his face pale with a dark stubble growth. He is a lone figure, cast against a misty backdrop. There are strange faces of children in windows, an isolated house, endless sand flats, the strange distorted face of a woman, and even a group of unhappy villagers. Oh yes, this is very much in the 'classic' Hammer mould.

Kipps in the West End stage play version

Sinister Theatrics

This however isn't the first time that Susan Hill's 1983 novel about the solicitor's clerk Arthur Kipps, has been adapted. As Raymond Cummings discusses elsewhere in this issue, Stephen Mallatratt developed a theatrical stage play from the novel in 1987. *The Woman In Black* novel is a tense piece of story-telling, largely concerned with the experiences of the young Kipps, often spending periods of time alone in the large Eel Marsh house. Mallatratt emphasises the unsettled atmosphere of the solitary experience by reducing the cast to two. Kipps, now an old man, rehearses a telling of his story with the help of an actor playing the younger him, while Kipps takes on the part of everyone else he met. As they rehearse Kipps hopes that by telling the story it will free his family from the ghost that has



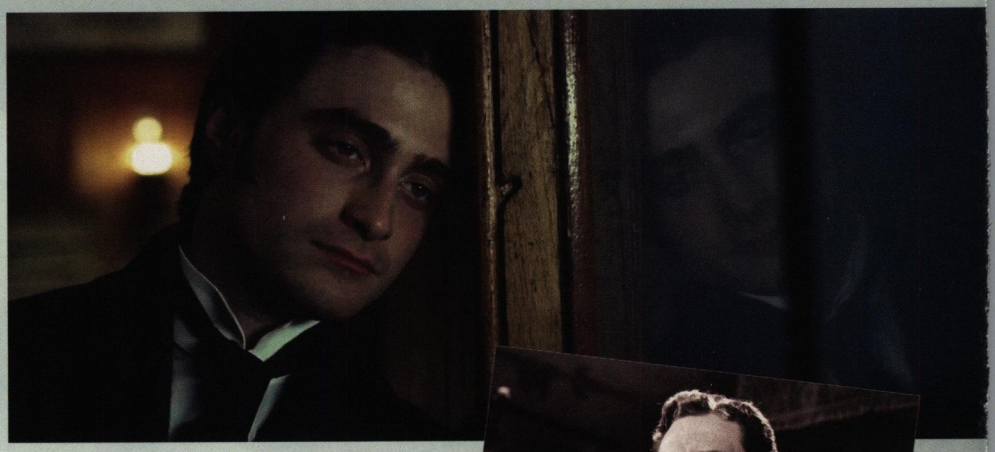
haunted them.

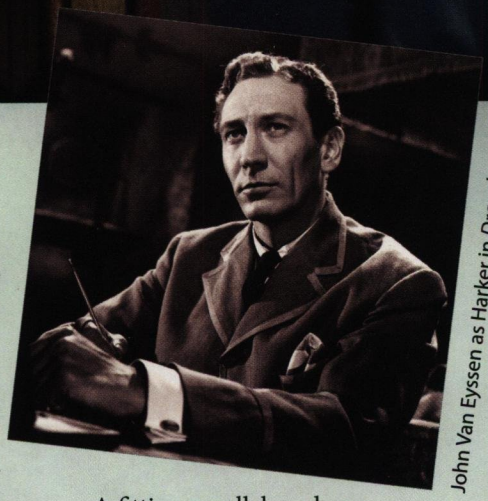
The play within a play concept has proved a boost. A potentially self-indulgent and alienating device it instead proves intelligent and one of the biggest chills of the entire narrative, such that the show is still running in London's West End, alongside national and international tours.

It was perhaps the success of the play that prompted the independent television network Central to produce their version, airing on Christmas Eve 1989, in that most traditional of Christmas Ghost Stories mould. The legendary screenwriter, and creator of Quatermass, Nigel Kneale, was commissioned to adapt the narrative. He takes his usual liberties and crafted a screenplay which has been almost unanimously praised in the subsequent two decades as one of his finest creations.

The Woman in Black, 1989

Kneale was more than a little disingenuous when quoted in Andy Murray's biography of the writer (*Into the Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale*, Headpress:London, 2006) "Susan Hill's original book was very decent. I was putting in things that aren't even thought of in the book, like a wife and family" (p. 169). Of course, in Hill's novel Kipps' wife and children play a vital role, key to understanding the whole mystery of the titular character.





John Van Eyssen as Harker in *Dracula*, 1958

Instead Kneale presents Kipps (or Kidd as he renames him) as a rather weak and selfish figure, employed by an even weaker and selfish boss, making it difficult to ever really care for the character, particularly after he commits arson in his employer's offices. Never the activity of a likeable sort! Curiously, the actor Adrian Rawlins, who plays Arthur Kidd in Kneale's adaptation, would go on to work alongside his on-screen successor, Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter's father James in the Potter franchise.

Giving it a slightly modern feel, Kneale has Kidd stumble upon a series of wax cylinder recordings concerning the history of the Woman in Black, rather bringing this viewer in mind of Hammer's *Dracula* (1958) in which Van Helsing records his observations of the vampires on a wax cylinder machine.

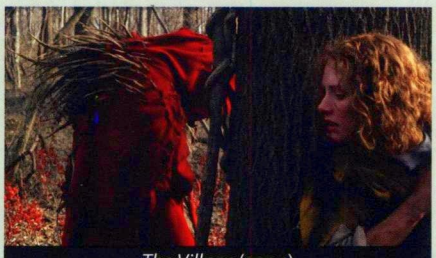
A fitting parallel, and one of many which can be perceived between the two titles. Kipps is a legal man, entrusted with sorting out an estate on behalf of his employer, much as Jonathan Harker is a legal man visiting Dracula to finalise the legal contracts for a property sale. In both instances, they are witness to strange supernatural occurances, and mysterious figures and sounds, before coming to believe the truth about what is happening to them.

It is a gift of visual medium like theatre, television and cinema that the visual is given such prominence. Susan Hill's prose paints an eerie landscape, and read in the right circumstances, will chill to the bone by suggestions. The visual arts aren't offered the luxury of ambiguous suggestion, instead they must tease with visual clues. Hill describes the woman in black as having a wasted face, almost like someone who had suffered from starvation. The television adaptation presents us with an older woman, clad in figure

hugging black, slightly stern and mostly seen from a distance. When we do get to see her up close, it is nightmarish, a hellish vision, but one which defers perhaps too much to stage make-up conventions.

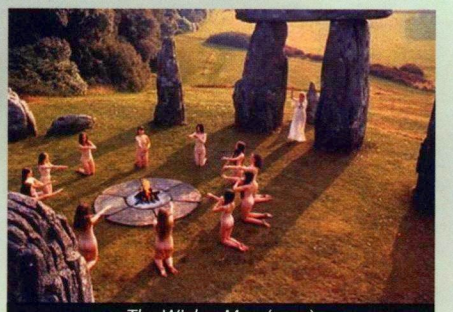
What is horror?

When I spoke with author Susan Hill by email recently she told me that *The Woman In Black* was not a horror story, and that horror is not something that she would ever write. But when you stick the



The Village (2004)

Hammer name onto a film with supernatural/gothic tones it is inevitable that people will draw the conclusion that the story is a horror. But while *The Woman In Black* is a ghost story and a thriller, I'd also argue that by definition, as a story



The Wicker Man (1973)

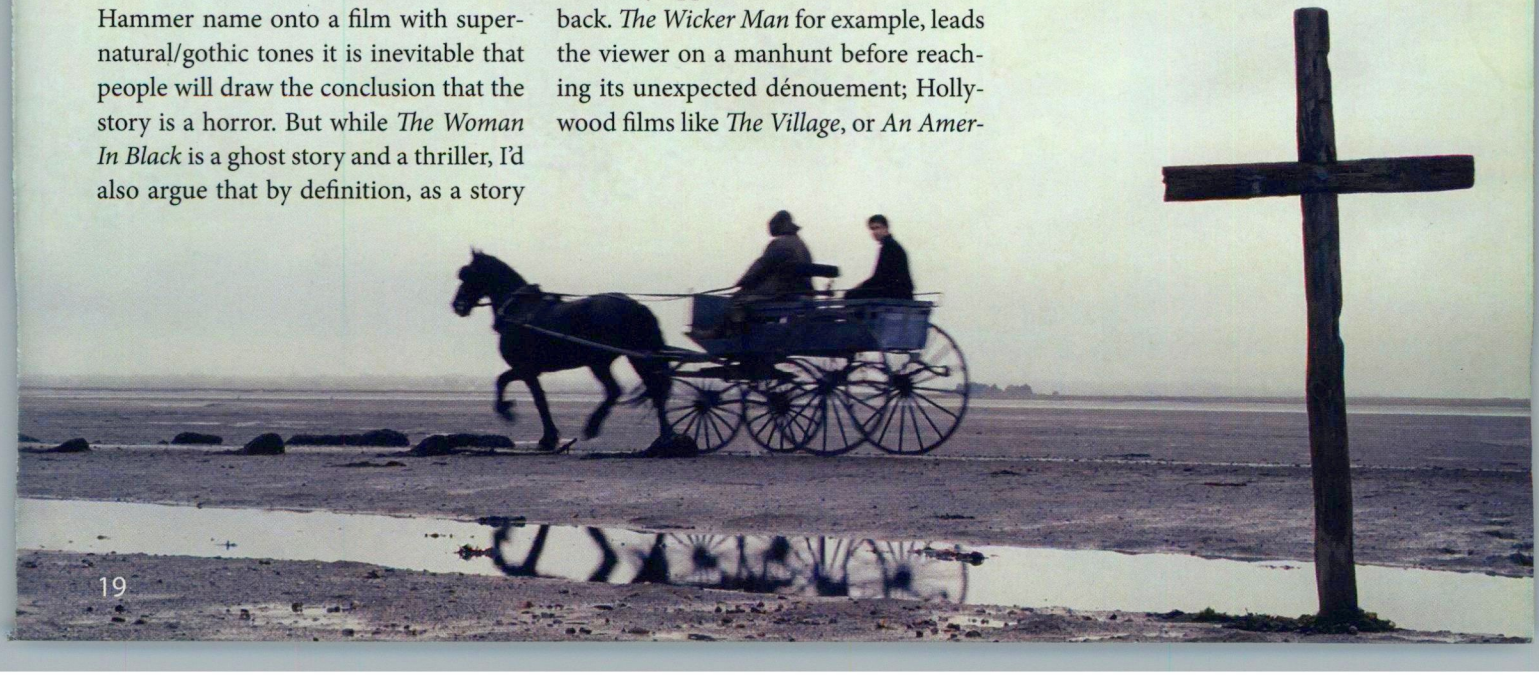
which has the capabilities of frightening the reader, and chilling them (and Mallatratt's adaptation has also successfully done so) then it is the very thing that a horror story should be. This is a traditional horror narrative in the Victorian mould. Evoking the chilling tales of British writer M.R. James, and playing very much on the 'less is more' approach.

While horror cinema in particular has moved into the realms of increasing gore and violence, there is still a healthy appetite for tales which hold back. *The Wicker Man* for example, leads the viewer on a manhunt before reaching its unexpected dénouement; Hollywood films like *The Village*, or *An American Haunting* could feasibly be classified as horror films, but are not dependant on gorey excess for effect. I heard academic Mark Jancovitch at a conference in 2010 talk about Hitchcock's films in the 1940s being reviewed as horror pictures—and critics today would probably shy away from that definition.

This magazine is engaged in an exploration of all aspects of horror, and that should include horror along the varying definitions given to it over the years.

Classic Hammer Horror?

From the few trailers that have been released it seems that Hammer and director James Watkins are going for some more conventional chills, with full use being made of visual and sound effects to help create an air of unease. Screenwriter Jane Goldman has evidently taken some liberties with the original novel too, presenting something rather more akin to the Hammer films of old—with Kipps as an outsider, unwanted by the villagers and perceived as a threat to their stability and safety. He will encroach on a secret about their way of life and bring something to the fore which they would



Above: Eel Marsh house in Hammer's *The Woman in Black* (2012)
Left: Castle Dracula from Hammer's *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (1966)
Bottom: (left) Villagers from *The Wicker Man* (1973); and (right) *The Woman in Black* (2012)
Right: Michael Ripper as the barman from Hammer's *The Scars of Dracula* (1970)

prefer to remain hidden and unspoken. Exactly the sort of situation that occurs in *The Wicker Man*, or in Hammer's *The Reptile*, *The Plague of the Zombies*, *Brides of Dracula* et al. If we don't get a Michael Ripper-type barman I'll be very surprised (and a little disappointed!).

But we're speculating on a film before we've seen very much of it at all. There is a huge expectation riding on the success of *The Woman In Black*, at least as far as the fans' perspective of the company goes. It is frequently said that Hammer can never be what it was—so many of the personalities involved have passed on, and tastes have changed. But there is scope surely in a market oversaturated with nasties for something a little more restrained, a little more theatrical and precise to find an audience. This isn't Hammer's first gothic of the new incarnation, it isn't even Hammer's first period gothic (that pleasure goes to *Let Me In*), but it is the first Victorian/Edwardian gothic of the new company. A Hammer of speculation and received memory. That they've announced an adaptation of the steampunk novel Boneshaker might just suggest that Hammer are finding a modern way of embracing Victorian horror.

James Watkins has rather laid his traditional cards on the table with his outright rejection of the use of 3D during the production—something that was announced following the Cannes film festival last year, and subsequently pushed aside. With a modest $17million budget, Watkins and Hammer are pitching *The Woman In Black* just slightly above the standard budget of the classic gothics (and about $3million less than *Let Me In* and *The Resident*). Watkins has said that in the edit they realised that "less is

Above: The interior set for Eel Marsh house
Right: Daniel Radcliffe, location shooting
Bottom: One of the more conventional shocks in *The Woman in Black* (2012)

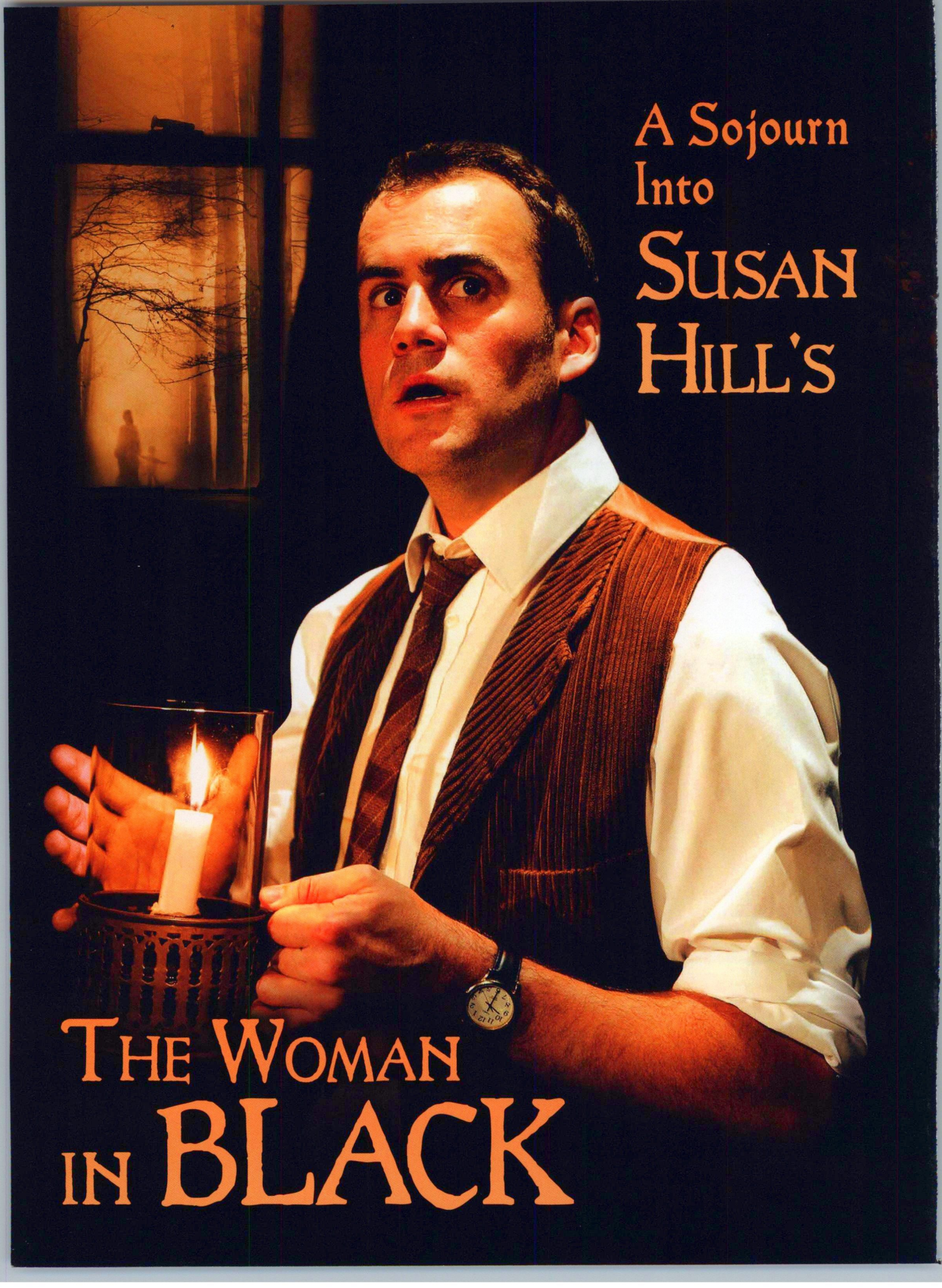
more" and they've gone for a slow-build with the final product—something which strikes as truer to the spirit of Hill's novel and the theatrical adaptation [1].

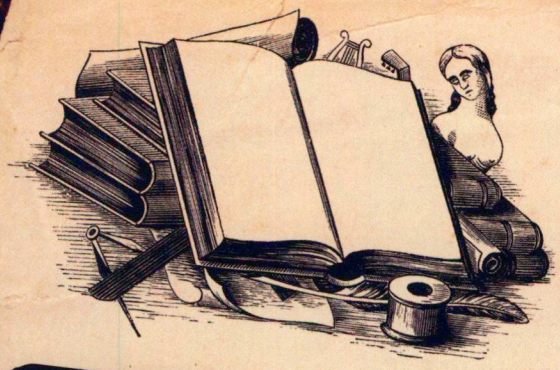
Principal photography commenced on 26 September 2010 near Peterborough, England, with Cotterstock Hall standing in for Eel Marsh house. Production continued through October and November in North Yorkshire and at Pinewood Studios. The marsh at Osea Island in Essex which had been used in the television adaptation was used again, and scenes were also shot at the fabled Black Park (which Pinewood Studios backs onto), a location used by scores of Hammer productions since the 1950s. Production wrapped on 4th December 2010.

Just like the revelations that befall Kipps in *The Woman In Black*, so too will audiences have to wait until the release of the film in February 2012 before they can pass judgement on whether the spirit of Hammer lives on to haunt the minds of another generation. But the omens are good.

by Robert J.E. Simpson

[1] http://www.hammerfilms.com/thewomaninblack-vault/page
Accessed 5 December 2011


A Sojourn
Into
SUSAN
HILL'S
THE WOMAN
IN BLACK



Of Cobbled Streets, Darkened Skies and Shades in the Dark

THE FIRST TIME was a late January night. I was in London on a research trip to the British Library. My days had been filled with research into the journeys made by medieval poets through the streets of their London. I poured over 20th and 21st century critical considerations of Geoffrey Chaucer and Thomas Hoccleve one day, and then the next would move into the manuscripts room to explore 14th, 15th and 16th century texts. On this day in particular, it had been cold and dry as I had entered and later left the library, but in the evening the sky's gloomy disposition suggested an intimidating forecast, and as I later left my small hotel and made my way to, and through, Covent Garden, the rain had already started to fall. The cobbled paths had quickly become slick, catching and fracturing the lights of the city, casting them as shards across the ground for passers-by hurriedly making for cover. I wasn't yet late, but I was eager, so, collar up, I pressed on, hugging the walls of the buildings I passed in order to better avoid the one moment fading, the next intensifying, hazes of water in the air. The street on which the theatre lies was dark, the most noticeable light the warm glow cast from the theatre's foyer.

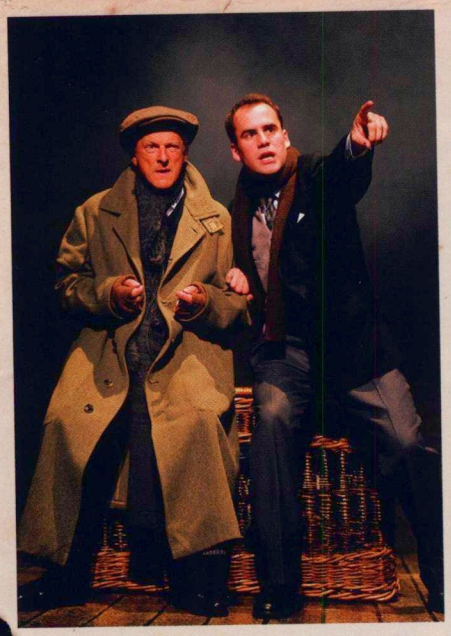
The play in question has been running in London's Fortune Theatre for over 22 years. The Fortune is located on Russell Street, a street off central Covent Garden that, during the day, seems relatively innocuous and, indeed, anonymous. However, at night, and perhaps especially during my first-time journey there, its recesses and the slicked paving lend it a threatening atmosphere which is more than in keeping with the venue's gothic production.

Of Broken Walls and Spectral Audiences...

The interior of the theatre is beautiful, and its nostalgic sense of a barely passed Victorian era begins to compound the feelings that Stephen Mallatrat's theatrical adaptation successfully inspires. I have been to see the play more than once, but the first I particularly remember how an unjust thought jumped into my mind as a cohort of American teenagers were paraded into the stalls: they're going to ruin it. The epiphany was immediately beaten down as I realised that the reactions of these high school children could in fact only add to the deliciously unnerving qualities of the play.

The conceit of the play, which carries the action of the play along, is that Kipps has sought the assistance of a young actor to prepare himself for the telling of a ghost story. He mentions the Yule scene of competing ghost stories with which Hill's original novel begins, and then endeavours to read his account of that night and his haunted past. The young actor moves back and forth, and eventually, manages to inspire Kipps into relaxing and beautifully performing not only his own contemporary part, but also the roles of his story's supporting cast. The young 'professional' actor himself becomes the story's youthful Kipps, and from this moment the uses of mime and of the strewn dregs of their playhouse's scattered props rapidly transform as the full wonder of the theatre's sound effects and projected backgrounds draw the audience into the story.

It is a resonantly self-reflexive production. From the start the boundaries between the audience and the stage are broken down, and at any moment various beautifully timed elements occur both on stage and off. The greatest role and series of sound effects is played by the audience as a whole, who time and again find themselves at the mercy of the production, and of their own fearfully febrile imaginations. The high school students that my mind initially maligned deserved a commission from the theatre itself as their screams and gasps played beautifully into the production's amazingly crafted storytelling. It also presses



you to feel excitement and anticipation rather than fear and dread. These darker emotions come later as the audience members, thrilled and a little relieved that it is only a play, wander out again into London, and leave the troubles and torments of Arthur Kipps, Crythin Gifford, Mrs Drablow and, finally, the Woman in Black behind them.

The Woman in Black

Susan Hill's original novel, upon which Stephan Mallatratt's play is obviously based, was first published in 1983. The novel's plot is delicately unfolded, continually overlaying its hidden dreads and dark secrets beneath the youthful lights of hope, ambition and disastrous naivety. It is the thrilling story of Mr Arthur Kipps, a retired solicitor, who one Christmas Eve feels pressed to commit to paper the events of his time in Eel Marsh House, the deserted and desolate home of the deceased Mrs Alice Drablow, which lies close by the fictional village of Crythin Gifford. As a young man and an ambitious solicitor, Kipps eagerly accepts the commission of putting all of Mrs Drablow's affairs in order, and makes his way from London to Crythin Gifford to attend her funeral and organise the voluminous collection of papers that the deceased woman had accumulated in her long and apparently solitary life. However, as his journey unfolds, Kipps more and more experiences a growing sense of unease, initially inspired by the behaviour of any locals who learn of his destination, but which is later recognised as being more instinctive: a primal fear that rails against his natural bonhomie and begins to manifest itself in strange sights and sounds, and in the malevolent countenance of the mysterious Woman in Black.

Traditions, Tricks and Triumphs

Part of the novel's allure lies in its treatment of the generic conventions to which its narrative adheres. It is an impressively crafted ghost story, which effectively utilises many of the traits that a reader might expect to encounter. However, it also beautifully chooses elements that are too often neglected within gothic horrors, and yet are tried and tested traditions. As the reader opens the novel and begins to read its first page there should be a thrill of mingled excitement and relief that the story begins upon a beautiful Christmas Eve. We encounter Kipps' narrative voice upon an evening that for many is a site of happiness, warmth, comfort and pleasurable anticipation. We often forget however, that Christmas is perhaps just as associated with ghosts and other elements of the supernatural as Halloween, and as an aged Kipps, surrounded by his extended family, observes:

> There was something in the air that night, something, I suppose, remembered from my own childhood, together with an infection caught from the little boys, that excited me, old as I was. That my peace of mind was about to be disturbed, and memories awakened that I had thought forever dead, I had, naturally, no idea. [1]

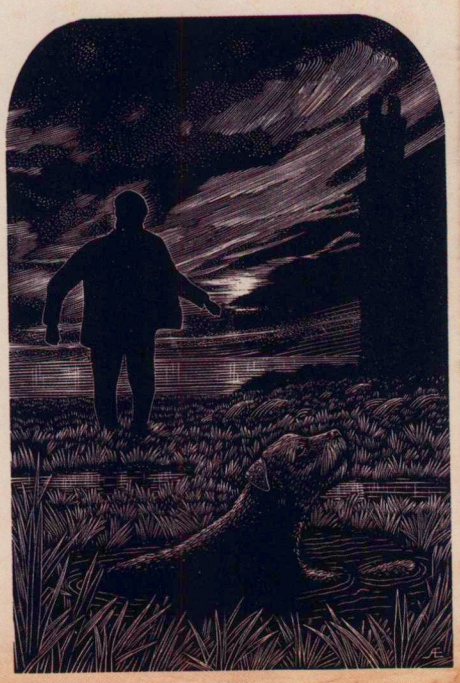
Caught between his family's competition to tell the most gruesome of ghost stories and 'the rising flood of memory' the desperate Kipps makes his way out into the cold night to settle his nerves. In a moment celebrated by the novel and the play alike, Kipps has an epiphany inspired by his childhood experience of Shakespeare as he remembers:

> 'Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
> This bird of dawning singeth all night long.
> And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
> The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
> No Fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallowed and so gracious is that time. [2]

So it is that the reader begins their journey with Kipps upon a night full of warmth, family and comfort. Kipps takes the decision to commit his secret to paper, to cathartically release it in an effort to finally be rid of the time that tormented him, and as we move ahead with him in his endeavour Hill also ushers us along with an undeniable truth: what lies ahead is as far from the spirit of Christmas as it is possible to be.

Of Counterpoints and Balance

The novel beautifully balances a series of oppositions across its plot. London is a mainstay of several of Susan Hill's other ghost stories. Her narrators, who see it at once as both a comfort and as



site to be feared, often treat it with reverence and awe. The author's initial presentation of London engages the vision of cities that exists within gothic horrors as murky, anonymous abyssal labyrinths within which the soul finds itself drawn towards captivity and loss. It is a city that Hill often turns to as a stock geographical character in and of itself, a site with its own reliably familiar and yet sinister character. As Kipps remembers:

> In the streets, there was a din, of brakes grinding and horns blowing, and the shouts of a hundred drivers, slowed down and blinded by the fog, and, as I peered from out of the cab window into the gloom, what figures I could make out, fumbling their way through the murk, were like ghost figures, their mouths and lower faces muffled in scarves and veils and handkerchiefs, but on gaining the temporary safety of some pool of light they became red-eyed and demonic. [3]

There is no reason for the aphorism to come to mind at this point in the novel, but Kipps' recollection of the city foreshadows the thought 'better the devil you know' and it is not long before the young solicitor finds himself at a point where the demons of his city would be preferable.

Within the novel there are no simple lines to be drawn between one realm and another, however. Where the novel begins in the rural idyll of Kipps' family, it is his movement from a Dantean Inferno-esque London towards the isolated rural settlement of Crythin Gifford that actually marks the growing of Kipps' danger. Much like Jonathan Harker making his way towards Dracula's castle in the Carpathians, or Victor Frankenstein's recuperative escape into the Alps, Kipps' naïve belief that the rural surrounds of Crythin Gifford hold some mode of sublime invigoration cannot be further from the truth. The locals' antagonism, or apathetic reaction to Kipps' friendly conversations once they discover his destination, prey upon the young man's mind, anticipating the rapidly approaching dangers of foolish exploration and tragic revelation:

> 'It's a far-flung part of the world. We don't get many visitors.'
>
> 'I suppose there's nothing much to see.'
>
> 'It all depends what you mean by "nothing."' [4]

To digress slightly, the play also captures the ethos of these moments beautifully, with the initial encounters occurring in the rattling sounds of a trundling train's steam engine and the discordant flashes and movements of the lighting effects of other passing locomotives.

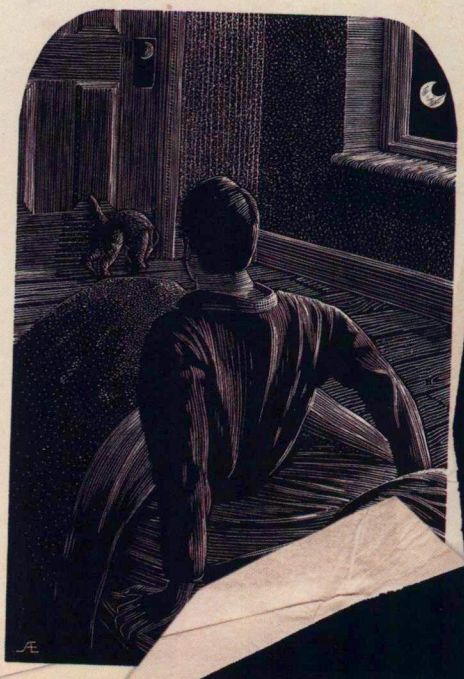
The tragedy of The Woman in Black is the power of secrets to enthral and destroy. Kipps' catharsis carries the new reader deeper and deeper into the secrets of the Drablow family and the tragedies of Eel Marsh House. His warnings are memories that he failed to heed and which dragged him downward towards his fate as surely as the marsh that surrounds the dread house. For the youthful Kipps the beauty of the marshes and the house distract him from the truth of their dangers, much like the white picket fences at the beginning of David Lynch's Blue Velvet mask the smaller realities of the burrowing insects that feed upon the dismembered ear within the neatly mown lawns. Initially upon seeing the house it is the beauty of the area that keeps him from going inside:

> …I did not go inside. I did not want to, yet awhile. I wanted to drink in all the silence and the mysterious, shimmering beauty, to smell the strange, salt smell that was borne faintly on the wind, to listen for the slightest murmur. I was aware of a heightening of every one of my senses, and conscious that this extraordinary place was imprinting itself on my mind and deep in my imagination. [5]

The full peril of this moment lies in the developing imprint upon Kipps' mind. As his story frees him from this impression so too do we perceive the earlier contagion of the marsh, the causeway and the house. As Kipps enters the building for the first time the damage of his arrival at Crythin Gifford merely infiltrates deeper. We see the peril of his memories, memories that he has no intention of sharing, and to which we, the readers, have now become privy.

Final Thoughts and Memories

In September 2008 The Fortune Theatre presented five nights of special performances of the Japanese translation of *The Woman in Black* [6]. The performances celebrated the 150th anniversary of the commencement of diplomatic relations between the UK and Japan, and happily coincided with the 20th anniversary of the play's presence in the West End. It was a serendipitous occasion for all con-



cerned, but also marked a serendipitous convergence of the novel's themes and the themes of Japanese cinematic horror explored in films such as *Ringu* and *Ju-on*. Where the novel is an exercise in narrative catharsis, the play is something else entirely: a vessel that does not harbour an infection but a contagion: a dread harbinger of potentially revived and fearfully directed malevolence.

Secrets are a dangerous currency within the novel, a fact that the narrative's development seeks to overcome. The genius of the play lies in its recognition of this fact and in its embracing of the danger of these secrets. Reality and memory become blurred, performance and spectre spill out from the stage, and as the audience finally make their way either to their homes or back to their hotels, their eyes are drawn reluctantly to the shades of doorways or the silences of the emptier streets. Should the shades shift, the audience shudder and move on, fearing secrets and amusedly thinking to themselves: 'It's just a story after all.'

> Outside in the streets the air was raw and a light mizzle greased the pavements, and had chilled my face and damped the sleeves of my coat. But I had made the best of my walk down through the narrow streets and alleys of Covent Garden, dodging between stalls and barrows, glimpsing the interior of the Halls, lit like glowing treasure caverns within... [7]

by Raymond Cummings

Wood engravings courtesy and © 2011 Andy English. Produced for Profile Books' recent reissue of Susan Hill's novel (www.profilebooks.com). Individual full-size engravings and complete portfolio of illustrations available at www.andyenglish.com

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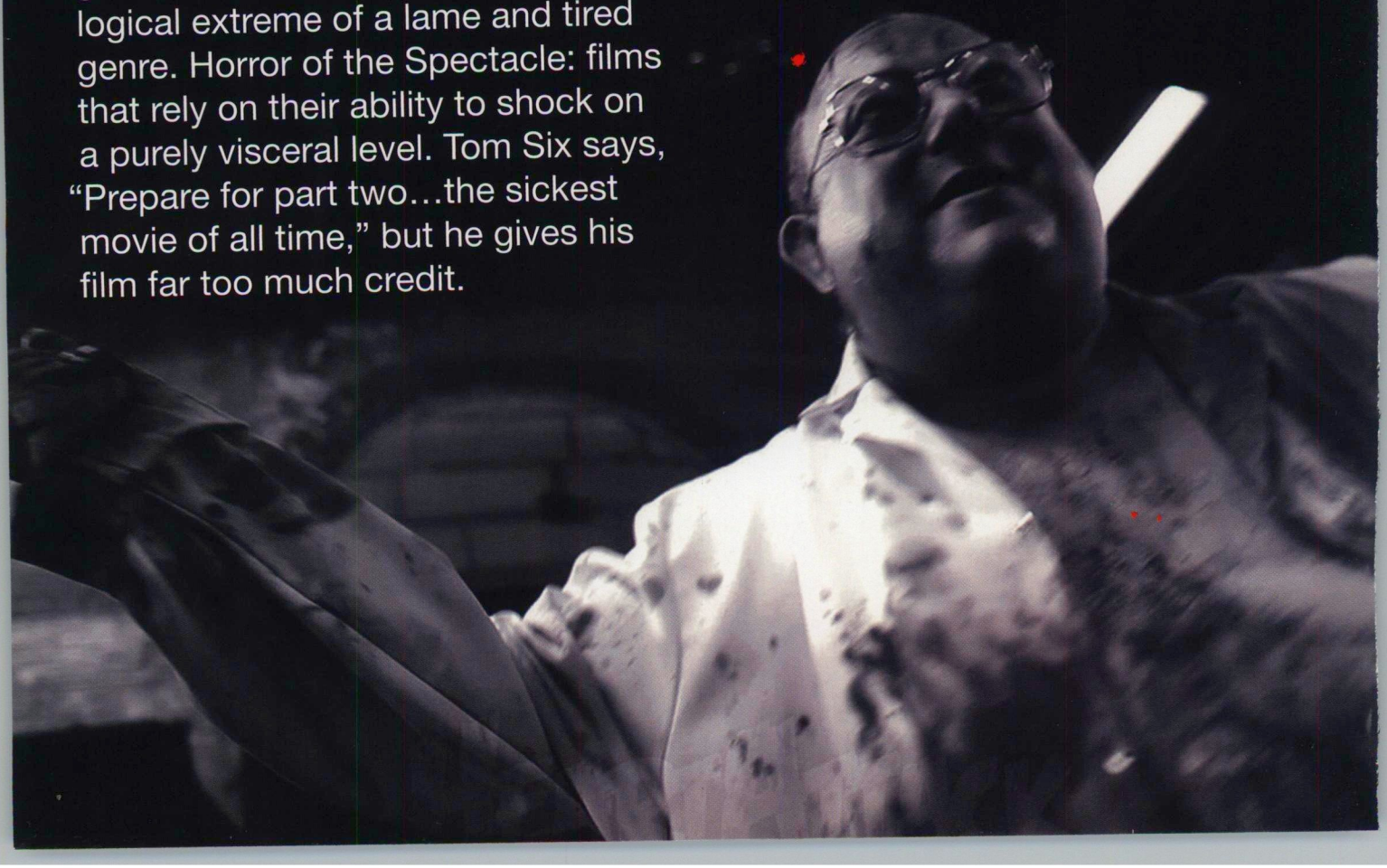
THE HUMAN CENTIPEDE

THE DEATH OF A GENRE AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FILM

The Human Centipede (Full Sequence) is a bad movie, but I guess it had to be made. It's the logical extreme of a lame and tired genre. Horror of the Spectacle: films that rely on their ability to shock on a purely visceral level. Tom Six says, "Prepare for part two…the sickest movie of all time," but he gives his film far too much credit.



THE WORD "SICK" is replete with psychological, social, and cultural connotations that are simply too complex for *The Human Centipede*. The film instead exists in a bubble of dark spaces, detached from any real world context. The film isn't sick—it's gross and sophomoric. It purports that disgusting images/actions alone can shock. I argue they can't. One scummy pile devoid of foundation—heaps of grossness shoveled upon more grossness—falls upon itself stupidly, leaving the viewer bored and uncomfortable, nowhere near horrified, and definitely not impressed.

Michael Bertini (Creative Director at *Diabolique*) and I visited his family for the weekend. We watched the film in the living room. We told his father, "You probably don't want to see this." His father said, "What? The Human Centipede? A guy turns into a centipede. It's like Goldblum in *The Fly*."

That's admittedly a near pointless aside, but I include it because it was honestly the most exciting moment in my viewing experience. There are only two other times when the film actually affected me the way a horror movie ought to.

Twenty minutes into the film there's palpable tension when Martin and his mother are eating dinner. The mother says, "I've decided to kill us both." Base heavy music from the flat upstairs permeates down through the ceiling, a slow gushing of noise, and the space between walls of the small room seems to shrink unimaginably. I'm anxious and indulge in the sort of domestic horror consequent of a destitute mother and son, forced to struggle alone (the same defamiliarized domesticity we experience in a film like *A Clockwork Orange*).

The scene is brought into harsh relief when in another twenty minutes Martin bashes his mother's head in with a tire iron and sits the bloody corpse upright at the dinner table. The metaphorical decay of a pointless life of suffering is now literal; the faceless mother, dripping blood is calm at the cheap but clean dinner table. Asthmatic dumb Martin sits across from her, mildly surprised, largely unaffected and presumably happy with his work. Here ends any arc or substance in the film.

What else? Not much. There's a self-mocking shout out to Quentin Tarantino that I imagine Quentin Tarantino would grimace at. That's about it. I sat through the rest of the movie, gritting my teeth, watching Martin stitch his victims together, mouth to anus, anus to mouth, injecting them with laxatives so they shit in each other's mouths, you know, et cetera… I feel sloppy even writing about it. Any more of an attempt would lapse into something like Tosh.O's recap of the first film (which was hilarious and ironically worlds better than the actual film—see comedycentral.com). But I won't stomp on his ground.

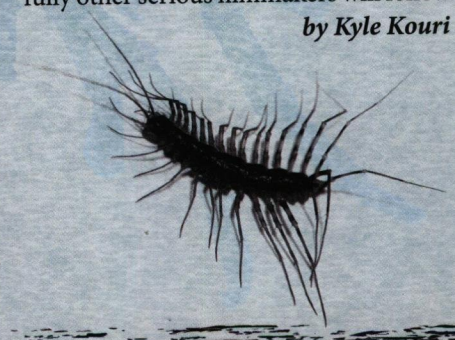
Ultimately, *The Human Centipede* does go further than any other film I've seen. But all the viscera is an embarrassing waste of time. I did not remember the film (I've watched it again to write this essay). I had no nightmares or fear of parking garages, fat men or England after the film. Simply put, it went in one mouth and out the other ass.

Six's film is a hallmark of failure. It makes the statement: "In case you were wondering if a film devoid of character, plot, or substance can stand on its own and horrify with hollow violence and torture…it can't." Depthless carnage is not scary. *The Human Centipede* marks a crucial step for the horror genre. Any horror filmmaker's attempt that follows the mindless shit-stained, intestine death trail of Tom Six will miserably fail, and even worse: will be undermined by a better worse film (*The Human Centipede*).

Alternatively, any filmmaker that recognizes horror doesn't exist in grizzly images alone and ventures out into new territory—really, the old neglected paths paved by Kubrick and Polanski—will be a step closer to reviving a genre that's been littered with nonsense, abused by gimmick, and generally near death for a very long time.

After all, a horror film should shock because in its hyperbolic way it reveals something about our own psychological perversity; it acts as a social critique; or finally, advances film and intellect through innovative and subversive technique, displaying philosophical dread and despair. Filmmakers like Michael Haneke, Lars von Trier and, more recently, Kevin Smith are bold, lonely pioneers—hopefully other serious filmmakers will follow.

by Kyle Kouri



Creepy Crawly

MARTIN SPEAKS!

An Interview with Laurence R. Harvey

Laurence R. Harvey may now have achieved worldwide infamy as the mentally-imbalanced security attendant who attempts to recreate his favourite movie, *The Human Centipede*, but chances are, if you live in the UK, you'll have seen him before. In stark contrast to Harvey's horror film debut, aside from performance art and live theatre Harvey is best known for children's television. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume that his career will now be following a different path.

THE 100% MEDICALLY inaccurate film *Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence* (hereafter referred to as *HC2*) is controversial partly due to its content, yet mostly because of the media storm instigated in the UK by the British Board of Film Classification. Drawing comparisons with David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, Jodorosky's *El Topo* and even Peter Jackson's über-gore masterpiece *Braindead*, the film was never intended for a mass audience. Harvey describes it as a "Midnight Movie", most suited to the Frightfest crowd, and those who would be most offended by the material in the film would never go to see it anyway. *Diabolique*'s Adrian Smith had the opportunity to catch up with horror cinema's latest, and most unlikely, cult icon just before he set off to Australia, one of the first countries to allow the film to be seen, for yet more film festivals and promotional appearances. Be warned, there are some spoilers in this interview.

AS: You must have expected to be kept busy when you started making the film.

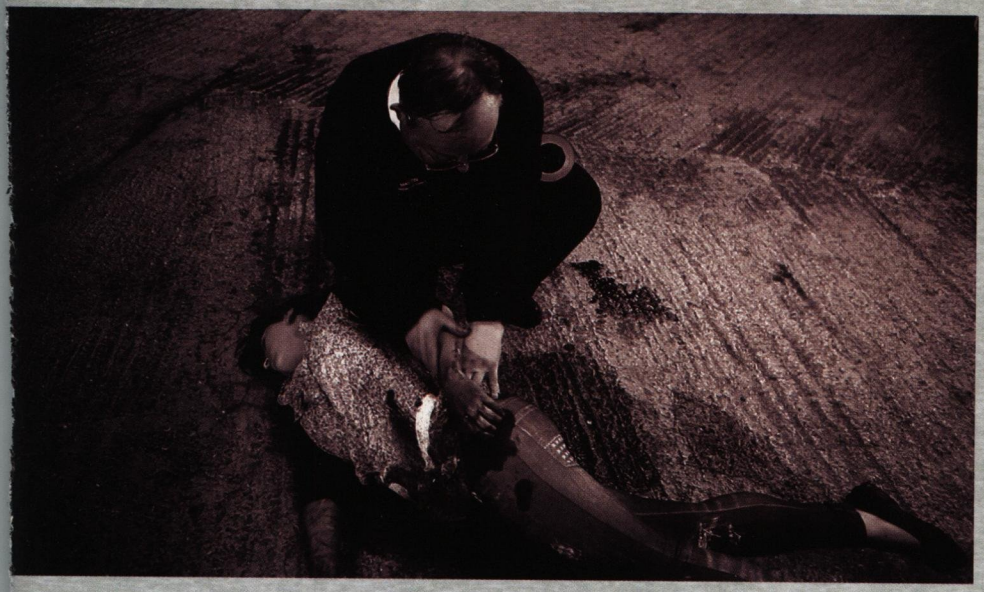
LRH: Yes, only because I was seeing what was happening with Dieter [Laser—who plays Dr. Heiter in *The Human Centipede*]. When I was originally cast the first one was really just a cult festival hit. It wasn't the cultural meme it became. I was watching the first one really take off, thinking, "Oh my, what's going to happen with this film?"

Before we talk about HC2, I must ask you about your work in children's television!

Yes, it was a brush with fame. I started out on *What's Up Doc* and *Parrallel 9* as the Little Green Man. I was a guest on *Live and Kicking* as the Little Green Man as well because the presenters were fans of the character [lost on our American readers, cult Saturday-morning viewing for kids in the 80s and 90s, Ed.]. Not so long ago I did the *Basil Brush Show* as well! I've been down to the Maidstone Studios several times!

Do you see yourself being able to work in children's television again?

Probably not! (laughs) Joking aside, I think, I'm an actor I'd be happy to. Now I guess the tenor of the roles I'm offered might change somewhat! It'll be scary little fat man, the evil lollypop man, or something!



HC2 is your first feature. How did Tom Six find you?

What he was looking for was actors of a specific body type, physically the opposite of Dieter, and he already knew he wanted to do it in the UK. He just went through *Spotlight* [UK casting directory] and ticked off a number of people who were short and stocky and whose faces he liked. I was lucky to be one of those people.

And how much did you know about the project? I understand your agent thought it might be porn!

To be fair to him, the website said "Adult entertainment in Amsterdam"! I knew about the first film because of it being on at Frightfest. Even though I'm not living in London at the moment, I always keep an eye out at what's playing at Frightfest, because they're usually quite good at choosing some interesting things. So I'd heard about it and was intrigued. So when Tom wanted me for the sequel I jumped at the chance. But I hadn't seen it. I didn't see the first one until the day of the casting. There was a screening in the morning and then across London and an hour and half later I was in casting.

At what point did you become aware that the character was never going to speak? Was that mentioned in the audition?

Most of his dialogue was going to be him quoting the first film and saying the odd broken sentence here and there. In the casting what happened was, apart from moment where Tom asked me to imitate Dieter, all the plot moments that we went through during the casting I just forgot to speak. It didn't make sense to speak at that time. The next time I saw Tom, he said "you were so great at communicating without speaking what I've done is taken out all your lines!" There was two lines at the end, but he's changed the ending. It kind of ended with me, with the centipede in my stomach, running out into the rain, shouting "Mama, Dada!" but it's such a clichéd image, he just felt it wasn't working. It was one entrance and exit to the warehouse too much.

Was it liberating for you as an actor to go back to silent film?

I was a big fan of silent film. Thinking of it in those terms actually helped me try and get sympathy for Martin. One of the choices I made was to try and use the Buster Keaton deadpan a bit, approach some of the violence, at the beginning at least, as if it was slapstick. The whole silent movie thing I really liked. It kind of made a lot of sense in terms of Martin's character.

Martin is like a modern-day Charlie Chaplin, the little man fighting against authority.

Martin is intelligent and pretty good at problem solving and so on - like taking teeth out with a hammer! It's not that he's mentally retarded. He does have intelligence; he's just socially and emotionally retarded. Understanding both himself and other people on an emotional level isn't fully developed. But he does have an intelligence, and he does speak - it's just that the film doesn't show the moments when he does. The bit when he's with the child, and he's a bit singsong and nonsensey, he has a charm that would be annoying if he was like that all the way through.

Were you aware of the comparisons Tom was making to other films?

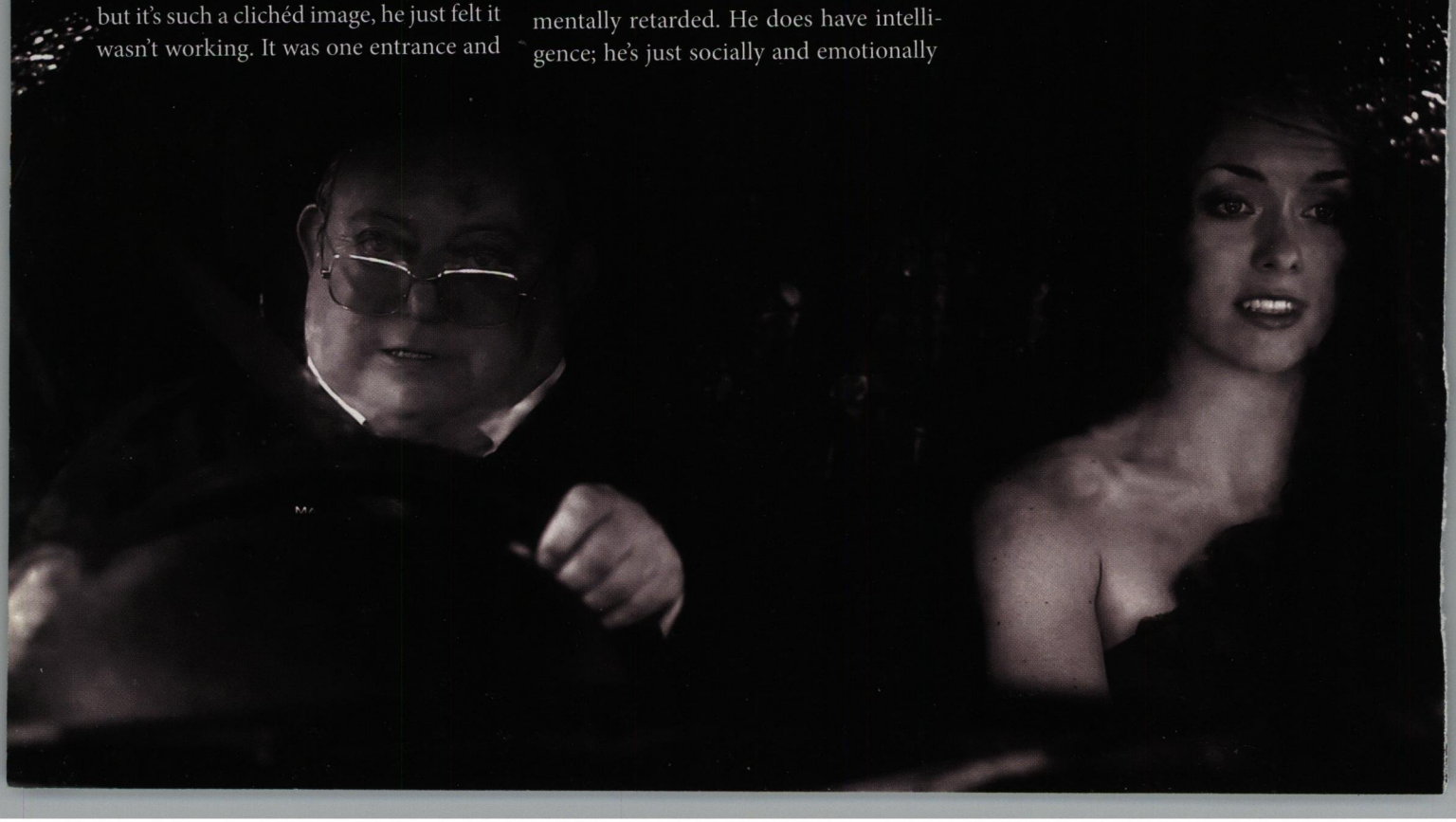
In the casting Tom said it was a Japanese gore film meets Ken Loach. Originally the colour was going to be really washed out, and in the process of playing with the colour he tried it in black and white and really liked it. It's not like its black and white explicitly to reference *Eraserhead*, it's kind of a happy accident.

I assumed it was in black and white because if all that blood had been red it would have been cut by the censors even more.

I don't think it was that. I think he wanted it to be a social realist film with this absurd OTT gore film situation.

The film was shot digitally I believe. Did this make the shooting process quite quick?

We were able to get through it all fairly quickly, and it meant the DoP could get down on the floor and get some low



angles and move the camera around a lot more than with a shoulder-mounted hi-def camera. It was all a lot more flexible and easier to set up.

Did that mean there was a lot of improvisation?

Yes. There was lots of coming up with ideas on set. Not all of them would be accepted! Tom knew what he wanted each scene, but you could suggest doing something else. The DoP was coming up with ideas as well. It felt very collaborative. I'm not sure whether then Tom just chose his ideas at the end! It's always nice when a director encourages you to throw in ideas and be a part of that decision-making process.

What was your reaction when you first heard the film was refused a certificate by the BBFC?

Initially I thought "Great, fantastic!", but quite quickly it became frustrating, because the whole film is a satire on the tabloid notion of someone who watches a film and becomes obsessed by a film and them simply acts it out. *The Human Centipede* idea is a pretty ridiculous idea to try and act out in real life. So there is an absurdity at the centre of the narrative. It's presenting their own fear and showing how ridiculous that fear is. It's so gory at the end it just proves how ridiculous it is. You've got a few big burly blokes in the centipede, and they're somehow not attacking me or trying to get free. So there is a level of absurdity throughout it in order to point out how absurd that tabloid notion is. That would be my take on it.

Did you feel that there would be censorship problems whilst you were filming?

What I thought was there was two scenes, the one with the sandpaper and the one with the barbed wire. Martin inflicts violence against himself because he can't relate to his own emotions and his sexuality normally. I thought those two scenes were going to go, and maybe the rape scene would be trimmed. I think he dealt with the rape scene where it wasn't seen as entertainment, and it was at the point in which any remaining sympathy you may have had for Martin has disappeared. So I think the rape scene had to be hard hitting, whether it was the full ten minutes or not. I think with the cuts as they are it still feels quite tough. I thought we'd have those trims, so it was kind of odd when the BBFC rejected it without any dialogue. And then what was most problematic and most ridiculous was the press release the BBFC put out. If you look at the other films they've rejected, there's quite an objective paragraph that doesn't go into detail. It doesn't try and get some sort of salacious interest in the press. It just simply states that we can't pass the film at this stage because of this tone or this specific act is depicted. Look at the press release for the rejection of *Grotesque*, whereas the one for *HC2* details pretty much all the violence in the whole film, whether it was problematic or not. It views the whole film as being about sexual violence, rather than two self-directed, or self-enacted moments of sexual violence.

It's interesting to compare to their treatment of A Serbian Film, *because of the BBFC's traditional bias towards "quality" or art-house films. Perhaps they treated that film more respectfully, whereas they appear to think that* HC2 *has no redeeming value whatsoever.*

They think that it's got no redeeming value at all, because of their opinions about Tom, and their opinions about the first film, which are in the press release. It goes way beyond the BBFC's remit. Those notes shouldn't be full of personal opinions and judgement calls of someone's other work or standing. It should just deal with the film in question.

The main thing the BBFC did was to get everybody talking about the film, who would otherwise have never heard of it.

It was always intended as a niche film, it's a gory horror film. If you don't like gory films, don't go and see it. I don't think *Human Centipede 2* goes after the

same audience as the Hollywood horror audience. It's more of a midnight movie. It absolutely splits the audience. A lot of people who like Hollywood horror just

can't stand it. I think it's because it's not a standard 3-act plot. It simply pushes through a satirical thing to its very limits. It's an A to B plot; it doesn't have the ABC structure. And because Martin either seems to get away with it or it's a kind of fantasy or rehearsal, at the end.

I read it as being a fantasy - that the whole thing is in his head.

I read it that he's kind of got away with it. There's something still niggling away at his psyche.

What difference do you think the cuts has made to the story? The overall sense of the idea, has it suffered because of the cuts?

I think the impact is kind of dulled. Because without the cuts part of the intent is that people who usually go and watch the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake or the glossier Hollywood torture-porn things, a lot of those people were complaining that the first *Human Centipede* film wasn't gory, there's a kind of macho element to that kind of criticism. With the second one, the uncut version the gore becomes so over the top and so ridiculous those kind of people freak out. It's a bit like you have to be careful what you wish for, or you might get it.

It's showing that violence is horrible, rather than entertaining.

Yes, but it kind of goes through that and becomes ridiculous, in a sort of theatre of the absurd kind of way. The bit where the pregnant woman escapes, the baby comes out, in the uncut version its head is under the accelerator pedal. The moment where it is accidentally killed was kept in the film. Together with Ashlynn [Yennie]'s defiance and popping the centipede down my rectum, those were the kind of points that showed a post-feminist level that's really positive towards the female characters, I think. There is a rejection of male dominance. A lot of stuff with Martin is sort of pre-adolescent, a bit like the early scenes in *Orlando*, where she she claims ownership of the one she loves. Ashlynn's rejection of him is very defiantly against that kind of pre-adolescent, or proto-adolescent look at romance. Katherine in the baby scene is very much a rejection of motherhood in order to survive. I think those things, from a more textually interesting perspective, are diminished by the cuts. I wasn't surprised the baby scene was cut out, but I would have been willing to argue it. It would have been a debate.

I have to be honest, I think that moment would have been a step too far even for me.

It is meant to be a step too far.

It reminded me of Andy Warhol's film Bad, where a mother throws her crying baby out of her apartment window, and there is a huge spray of blood when it hits the floor. So there is a precedent.

It also reminds me of the baby in *Braindead*! So this hasn't come out of nowhere.

The kitchen scene after Martin kills his mother and them props up her body at the table to continue eating, reminded me of the dining scene in Braindead. All that was missing was a spoon sticking out of the back of her head.

A lot of people have said it was like *Psycho*, but for me it was always *Braindead*.

If Tom Six follows the logical post-modern trajectory of HC2, the third film will have to be about a film director called Tom Six who kidnaps an actor called Laurence R. Harvey and stitches him to the front of an even bigger centipede.

He's filming the third film in America with American actors, but the beginning of the film will start with the end of the second film. I don't know if it's going to be presented as a film or a documentary, but somehow they will be watching a recording of the end of the second film. He's also making another film, called *The Onania Club*.

[If you google 'onania' to find out what that means, be careful you don't do it in public]. You've already had a taste of the cult status you're now going to be stuck with for the rest of your life. Are you prepared for this?

Yes! At one point, I was thinking if I died the obituary would say he was once the little green man on *Parallel 9*, and at least now it won't say that. I think that's a good thing!

In twenty or thirty years' time you'll still be going to conventions and signing photos.

I hope so! I could always do with the money!

You've basically got your pension plan now in place!

Yes, this is what I thought. I could live on conventions for the rest of my life! I've always been involved with performance art, so I will probably always be working, even if it's not as visible as this.

Have you started getting offers for other horror film roles? Are you going to be an in demand horror film actor?

I did get a request for a short film, but I think it was low or no budget. I think it was a pilot for TV. I just can't afford to do that now. I've been warned that I'm going to get lots of offers to play mad mummy's boys!

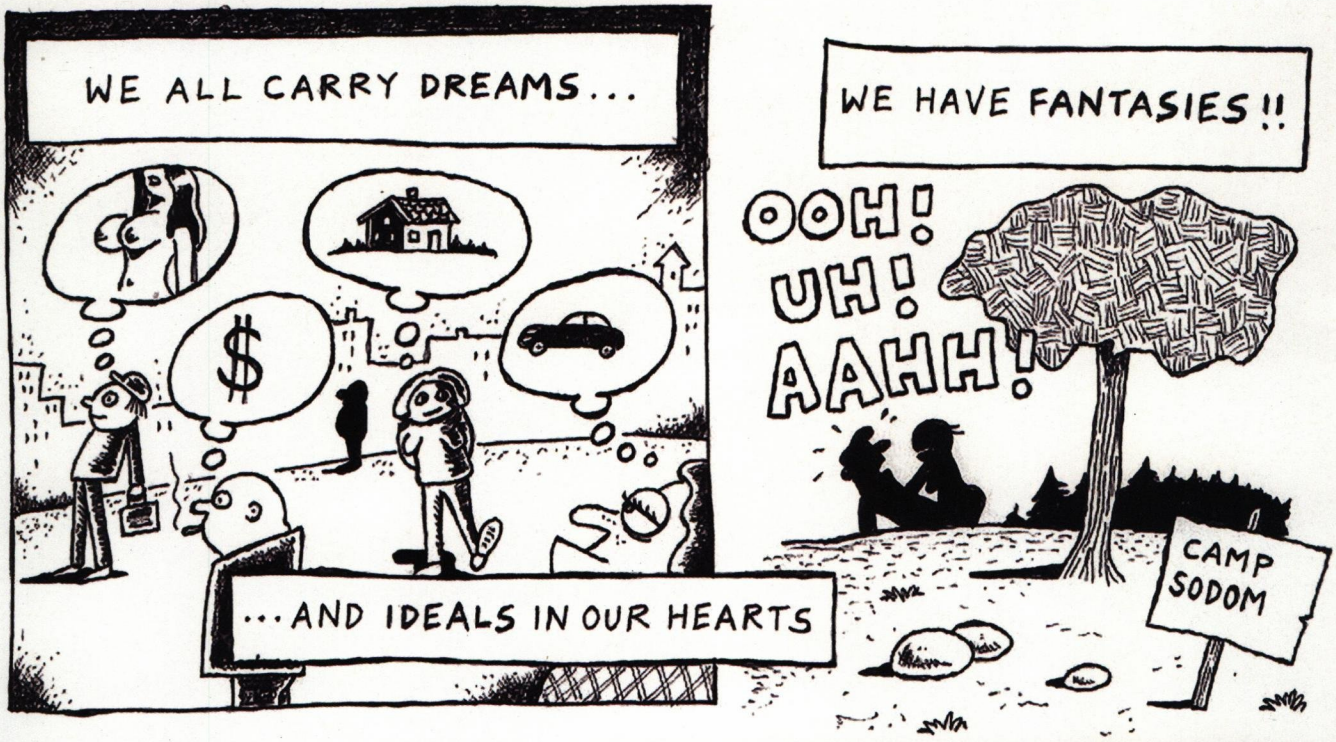
You can look at what happened to Anthony Perkins. Perhaps in twenty years you'll find yourself still popping up in Human Centipede sequels.

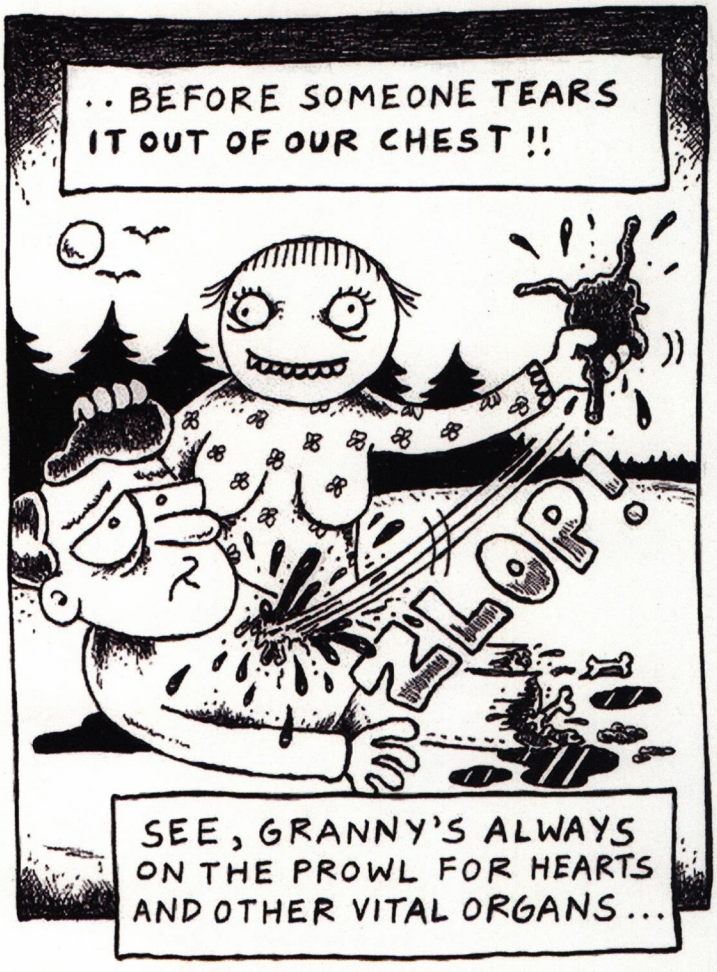
I think after the third one Tom will be sick of those films!

by Adrian Smith

Stone Cold Granny

© Janne Karlsson





COWBOYS AND CANNIBALS

an interview with RUGGERO DEODATO

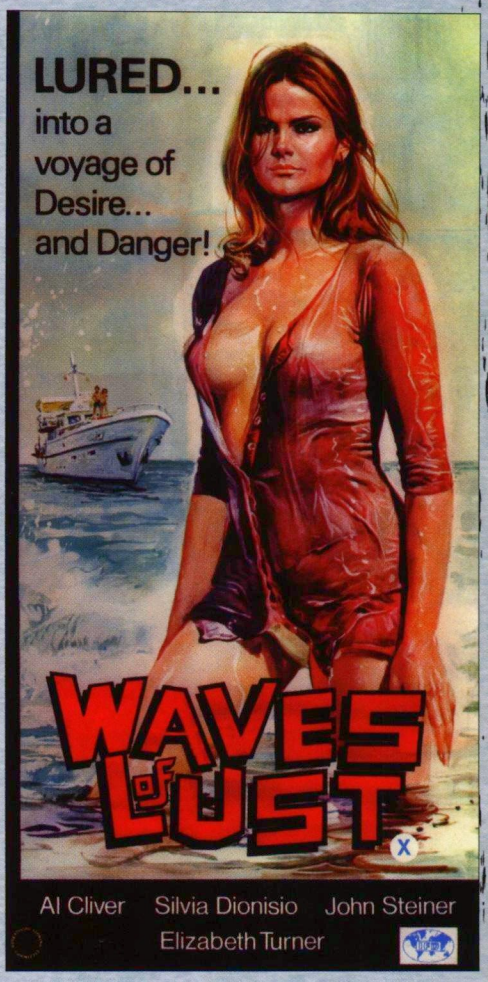
Any film director with titles like *Hercules—Prisoner of Evil*, *The Washing Machine* (a horror film about the household appliance) and *Gungala—The Naked Panthress* should have their status as a cult film icon secured. Ruggero Deodato has also made cop thrillers (*Live Like a Cop, Die Like a Man*), erotic thrillers (*Waves of Lust*), post-apocalyptic action movies (*The Atlantis Interceptors*) and disaster movies (*Concorde Affair*), yet it is a little film he shot with unknown actors in the middle of the jungle over thirty years ago that has cemented his reputation. The film's title has passed into legend as a byword for anything shocking, obscene, dangerous or just plain nasty. That film was *Cannibal Holocaust*.

Cannibal Holocaust, formerly labelled a 'video nasty' and only ever available in the UK with extensive cuts, has recently been passed by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) with only one deletion (a lingering shot on an impaled rat) and is now available on Blu-ray and DVD, accompanied by a new cut supervised by Deodato in which the most gruesome shots of real-life animal killing are obscured by damaged film noise. Deodato has always asserted that he did not like those moments in the film, and had only ever included them on the insistence of his producers.

Before making his name as a director, Deodato was working with some of Italy's most celebrated and prolific directors in the 1950s and 1960s. "I worked with many directors, but I consider the most influential teachers were Roberto Rosselini, who taught me about realism and how to make a film, coming up with new solutions according to the situation, without storyboards, maybe changing the story slightly, to adapt to the situation which had changed. Sergio Corbucci taught me about cruelty and how to wake up and startle the audience with a boom! Spectacle! And the third was Mauro Bolognini who taught me about elegance and style, and how to compose an image. For example he would give me a painting when I was his assistant, to teach me how to compose the extras. These three influences made sure that I can work in different genres, from commercials to films, to video clips, all sorts of genres. I've got these three people to thank."

Deodato got plenty of experience working in the horror genre, and a director he admired was Riccardo Freda, best known for the incredibly creepy *The Terrible Dr. Hitchcock*. "He was a total genius. Not only did he have the technique, but he was creative. He had imagination. He was an absolute master of that genre. I remember that Freda was making two films at the same time. He was doing *Romeo and Juliet* and *Les Deux Orphelines* on the same set. He would say 'Now, call Juliet,' then 'Now call Henriette,' and everything fitted, not one mistake. And also he was intellectually very dedicated."

The Italian film industry in the mid-sixties was producing literally hundreds of films every year, in every conceivable genre. This was an excellent learning ground for a young filmmaker. Deodato worked on the group of science fiction films which have become known as the 'Gamma One Space Quadrilogy': *Wild, Wild Planet*, *War of the Planets*, *War Between the Planets* and *Snow Devils*. These films were all directed by Antonio Margheretti in just three months (a fifth film was later added to the Gamma One series, a Japanese/US co-production *The Green Slime*, best known for its memorable theme song, but had no connection to Margheretti). Whilst he truly loved Margheretti, and they worked together many times, Deodato does not reckon that Margheretti was intellectually as strong as Freda. "His films were, but the technique wasn't something I admire. He would put these long tracking shots in which delayed the action and made it slower. He was also obsessed with models, cars, buildings, miniatures, which I didn't think were that interesting! But as a person he was fantastic and we were really good friends. I'm terribly sorry to have to say these things! In a way I'm offending his memory! I recently saw these films again. Terrible! I was not assistant director but second unit director. I liked Mario Bava's films. Not Margheretti's."



"I do like a film by Margheretti that

I worked on, *Danza Macabra* (known as *Castle of Blood* in the US)." Marghereti proved to be a true friend to Deodato on more than one occasion. "When I was replacing a director on the set of a film named *Gungala*, when I realised I was a real director on set, and no one else was there, I panicked a bit and called Antonio Marghereti and asked him what to do, asking for help. The fantastic thing was that Marghereti arrived immediately and was by my side. As soon as I saw Margharetti I suddenly said: 'Fine, I know what to do. Action!;' Corbucci would never have come to the rescue!"

Sergio Corbucci is probably best known for his spaghetti-western masterpiece, the influential and immensely entertaining *Django* from 1966. Deodato was a friend of Franco Nero, and recommended him for the main role to Corbucci. The film is swamped in mud. "Corbucci had the idea of writing *Django* when he was flicking through a comic and saw this image of a man dragging a coffin. Him and his brother wrote this little treatment just for fun, but he didn't really believe in the film, but then when the film went ahead, and it was going to happen, he did it, still not quite believing in it, but he had to do it as a favour for some young producers who were starting out, but he still wasn't convinced. Because it was such low budget they went to a studio that was almost abandoned, almost overused from filming cheap westerns, and nobody used it any longer because they were going to Spain and all sorts of places. When they went for the recce they found that it was full of mud and really disastrous, and they had this idea that instead of making it good, they would call a bulldozer to bring over more mud, and they increased the mud, making it really grim! The other idea that they had was that because all the extras were... well, it was a very busy period in the film business in Italy at that time and all the extras were really busy, so they were left with people from the neighbourhood, who were really ugly. They were toothless and diseased! We said 'These people are too ugly, let's put them in red Ku Klux Klan-type hoods, so at least we hide the fact that they are so ugly!' And that in a way helped to characterise the film!"

Before making his name as a film director, Deodato made a few films under different names, including the very American-sounding Roger Rockfeller. "At that time people in Italy would not believe in a film unless it had a foreign director. It had to look like it came from abroad. It had more credibility if the director was perceived to be foreign. Everybody changed their name, or modified it so it sounded foreign, sounded American basically. My first one was Roger Drake, then Rockfeller. I would change the surname. If the film had been a flop I would change it, if the film was lucky I would keep it, and apparently they've all been flops because those names didn't really last for long! Failure was lucky! The producers were quite confused. 'What name are you going to use?'! So for *Concorde Affair* they called me Roger Deodato. The fact that Rockerfeller's son had disappeared in the jungle was also part of the inspiration for *Last Cannibal World*!"

Before heading to the jungle for the first time for that Rockerfeller - inspired film, Deodato made what he considers to be his best film, *Live Like a Cop, Die Like a Man*, in 1976. "I like this film because there is a lot of myself in it. The inspiration was in part the Italian movies, but also the American cop movies. I found the Italian movies too domestic and not good! I put so much of myself in this film, and chose the protagonists, two wonderful good-looking guys. There was a contrast between the cruelty onscreen and the soundtrack which was sung by Ray Lovelock himself, the star of the film. I wrote the lyrics myself. It did work, and I've been nicknamed The American after this, as I added some elements in to the style that weren't typically Italian, so to this day people in Italy call me The American."

It was Deodato's second foray into the Amazon rainforest that was to bring him international fame, if perhaps for the wrong reasons. *Cannibal Holocaust* depicts the recovered footage of a lost documentary team. The mystery of their disappearance in the Amazon region becomes clearer as we see the atrocities they commit in an attempt to shoot a truly sensational documentary. What the team did not count on was the horrific revenge of the angry indigenous people, who had justifiably had quite enough. *Cannibal Holocaust* is a film which is well due its critical reappraisal. Maligned since it appeared on the Director of

Public Prosecutions list in the UK in the mid-1980s, it is actually a masterpiece in its construction and leaves the audience reeling. With beautiful cinematography and a lush romantic score, both of which can finally be fully appreciated with the release of the Blu-ray by Shameless, it is a truly powerful film. "In the jungle, because of the way the focus of the camera works, it's difficult to see what is behind the shot, it's difficult to give an idea of how thick it is, because you stop at the first level, you don't go any further than that. There wasn't a steadicam, so I always tried to use handheld camera and tried to go through that, and also slightly above. I would go up a small hill to give an idea of the vastness of this green jungle. And again even that was difficult to go up and over the canopy and just look down. I was one of the first to actually go to a real jungle. A lot of people in Italy were going in national parks and stuff like that. I didn't want to do that. What really offended me was one of the critics in Italy that said Deodato shot this film in the national park in Abruzzo, which is in the middle of Italy!"

With the passage of time it perhaps seems difficult to comprehend the outrage the film caused on its initial release. Despite taking an estimated $200 million in box offices around the world Cannibal Holocaust was banned in several countries, from Australasia to Scandinavia. Deodato was taken to court in Italy, at first charged with actually murdering his cast. What caused particular outrage was the sight of a native girl having been ritually impaled on a wooden spike. "The judge didn't believe it! I had a photo of me with her having lunch after we had shot that scene. He said I had had lunch with them all and then killed them. He still didn't believe me!" Deodato had to recreate the effect in court, achieved simply by having the actress sit on a bicycle seat attached to a pole, holding a long piece of balsa wood in her mouth. Eventually, to avoid going to prison for murder, Deodato had to bring his four main cast members to the court, despite them having signed contracts agreeing to make no public appearances for a year. Although the murder charges were dropped, Deodato still received a suspended sentence for animal cruelty.

With the BBFC having waived all but one of the the cuts to *Cannibal Holocaust* enabling the restored blu ray release, the publication of a revised and updated edition of the FAB Press book *Cannibal Holocaust and the Savage Cinema of Ruggero Deodato* (featuring a selection of rare artwork and photos, critical analysis and extensive interviews with the director), along with renewed academic interest culminating in his Cine Excess Lifetime Achievement Award, 2011 has been a very good year for Deodato. He is currently trying to secure funding for a sequel to his other notorious "nasty", *The House on the Edge of the Park*. Sadly the recent death of the star of the original film, David Hess, may have some impact on those plans.

Deodato has proved throughout his career that he is resourceful, imaginative and tenacious and it is not too much to say that his best films may still be to come.

by Adrian Smith

DR KNOX'S AUTOPSY TABLE

David Kleiler dissects the seemingly innocuous Parlor dialog scene from Hitchcock's* Psycho, *and shows why it's actually the key to understanding the film!

When I first saw *Psycho* in its premiere engagement over 50 years ago, I thought it was a flop. Yes, the shower murder was shocking, but I thought the rest of the film was all filler with too little action. In the early days of the film's release, we were instructed not to reveal the shower murder, but soon word got out. Still, nobody expected the star to get bumped off in the first third of the film. On top of that, the buildup to the shower murder was incredibly slow, not unlike Haydn's *Surprise Symphony*, which lulls the audience to sleep with extremely conventional music, only to suddenly awaken them with a thunderous surprise.

Little did I realize how wrong I was, for if one looks closely at the visual design, camera work and dialog of the seemingly innocuous parlor dialog sequence between Marion Crane and Norman Bates, which takes place in the back of the registration office of the Bates Motel, the core substance and meaning of the film are revealed.

First, there is the casting of the two leads. There is the rounded Janet Leigh and the angular Tony Perkins. This casting scheme is straight out of the Luis Buñuel's and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). Hitchcock was an unabashed Freudian, and it shows throughout this sequence. It was he who made the first American film to deal with Freudian psychoanalysis, *Spellbound* (1945), in which he got Salvador Dalí to design the dream sequence, which begins with a giant pair of scissors cutting across a nightclub curtain filled with eyeballs. When Hitchcock was in Germany in the 1920s, he visited the set of GW Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul* (1926), starring Werner Krauss (Dr. Caligari), the first film to deal with Freudian psychoanalysis. Much of the imagery from that film also crops up in several Hitchcock films, including both Spellbound and Psycho.

The Freudian circles and lines aspect doesn't end with the casting. It permeates the whole design of the sequence. The opening shot is a two-shot as Marion and Norman prepare to eat. They never again appear in the same frame until the end of the sequence. Between these two shots they exist in separate frames. She is filmed perpendicularly to the camera. Around her are a curved pitcher of milk and pictures of flowers in circular or ovular frames. On the other hand, Norman is filmed from low angles. This serves to accentuate the ominous birds with their pointed beaks, the candlesticks which he periodically strokes when issues of his mother come up in the conversation, as well as the stroking of his legs. Behind him, in rectangular or square frames are reproductions of classic rape scenes including the The Rape of the Sabine Women.

The room, of course, makes no sense from a designer's point of view, but in Hitchcock's symbolic world it makes perfect sense. In the last shot of this sequence, when we return to a two-shot, Marion gets up to leave, and in the frame is the beak of one of the stuffed birds, pointing at the curve of her neck, clearly foreshadowing what is about to happen.

We all know that Hitchcock had villainous mother figures in many of his films and that Norman Bates has issues with his mother. In the dialog of the parlor scene are such classic ironic lines as "A boy's best friend is his mother" and "Mother isn't quite herself today." This sets the background for the real meat of the dialog, which is important not only for the scene, but for understanding what Hitchcock is up to in the film as a whole. Marion Crane has fled Phoenix to escape to what Norman calls "a private island." As we eventually discover, she has gone from Phoenix to "a phoenix." That ties in with Norman's line "We scratch and claw but only at the air, only at each other, and for all of it we never budge an inch."

The bird references, which appear throughout the film, beginning with the film's opening shot (a crane shot that ends on a hotel window—the camera perching on the window sill before going through the window), are also heard throughout the dialog in the parlor scene. It begins innocuously enough when Norman observes that Marion eats like a bird. But later, when Marion tries to engage Norman in talking about the difficulties of dealing with his mother, suggesting, "Wouldn't it be better if you put her someplace?" he responds with hostility, saying, "People always mean well. They cluck their thick tongues and shake their heads and suggest oh-so-very delicately."

The link between birds and humans can be extended in the film. After the opening crane shot, which is the film's first point-of-view shot, the remaining POV shots are all from characters who are linked with birds. Marion Crane, Norman Bates (who stuffs birds), and Marion's sister, Lila Crane. Only characters con-

nected with birds get POV shots, and in Hitchcock's aesthetic, a POV shot can mean the audience is supposed to identify with the character through whose eyes we're seeing. In the first third of the film, all the POV shots belong to Marion Crane. Then point of view switches to Norman Bates, notably when he gazes at Marion though a peephole while she undresses. In that shot, we condemn him as a pervert, but we also want to see what he sees.

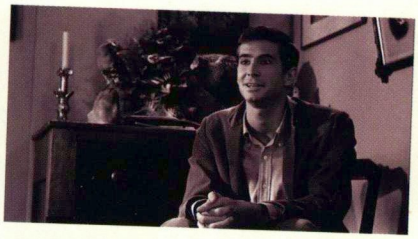
And then there's Lila Crane, played by Miles, in the last third of the film, where the POV shots belong to her, particularly in the memorable sequence of her going up to the house and meeting Norman's mother.

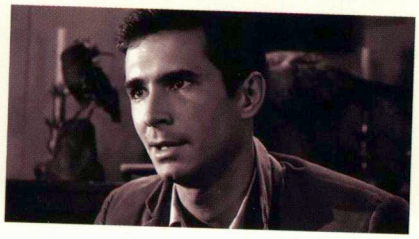
The linkage of POV shots, with their implications of voyeurism, makes more significant the first part of Norman's rebuttal to Marion's suggestion that he put his mother "someplace." He says: "Have you ever been inside one of those places? The laughing and the tears, and the cruel eyes studying you."

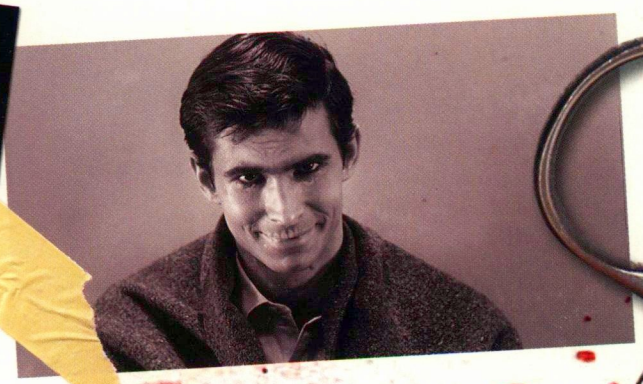
At the end of *Psycho*, Hitchcock does what he often does—gives a verbal ending and a visual ending. In this case, the verbal ending is the ridiculous explanation by the psychiatrist, in an overactive performance by Simon Oakland, a New York method actor whose style is totally out of keeping with the rest of the cast. It's a sign that Hitchcock doesn't mean for us to take it seriously as an ending. After the explanation, we hear Norman Bates speak off-screen. The guard to his cell says, "He feels a little chilled." The camera tracks down the corridor, and we look at the guards looking through the window, reminiscent of the "peeping tom" scene. We want to see, and this time we do. We see Norman in the guise of his mother, looking at the camera. In voice-over we hear what she is thinking. In that shot, we become the "cruel eyes studying" her, but in the logic of Hitchcock's use of point-of-view, we are looking at ourselves.

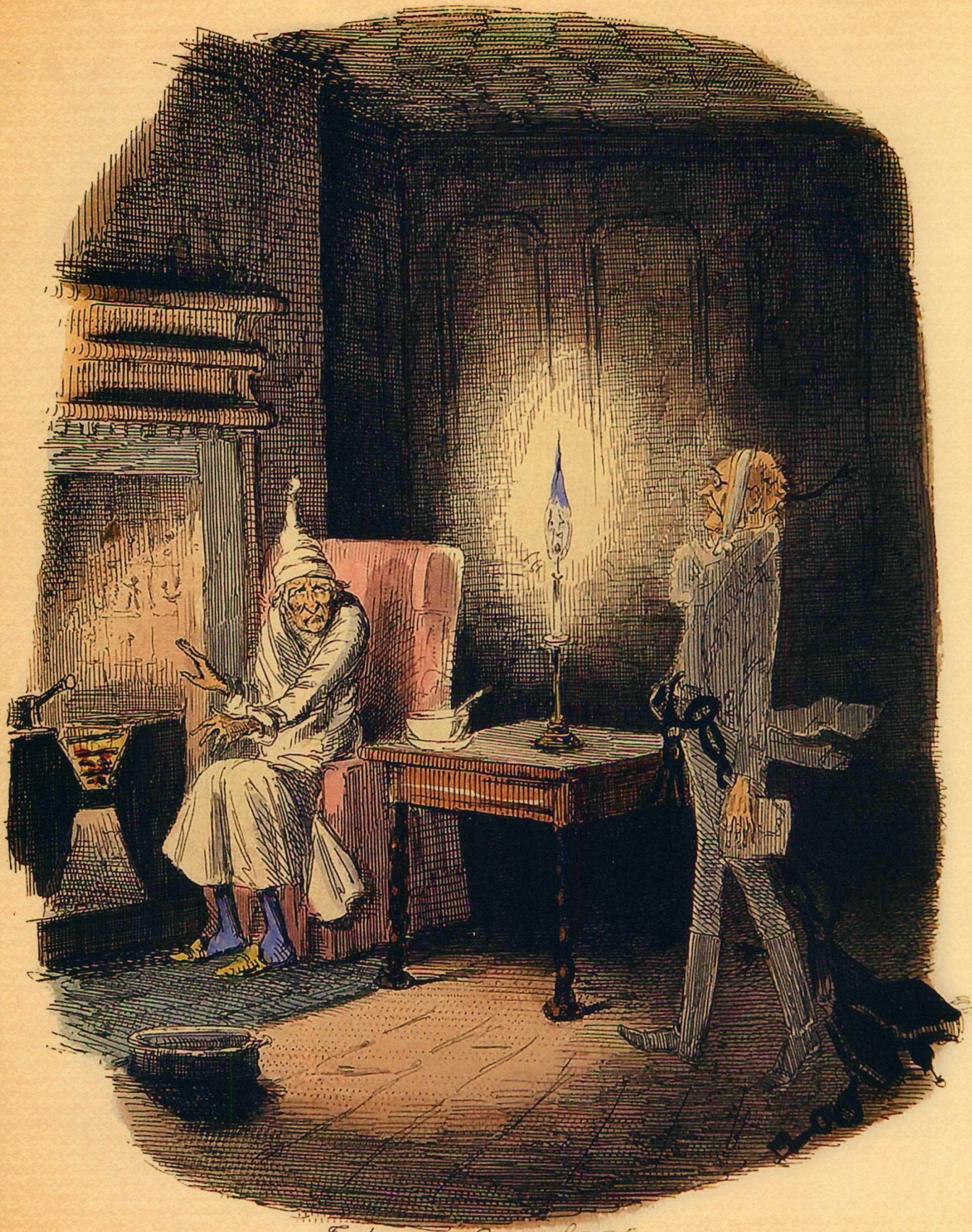
As Norman points out earlier in the parlor scene, "We all go a little mad sometimes." In that scene, Hitchcock spells out the themes of his film: "We're all in our private traps, we scratch and claw," and "we are all a little mad."

by David Kleiler








John Leech

DICKENSIAN GOTHIC

THE YEAR WAS 1843, and English literature had witnessed the zenith of early Gothic horror in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). On the other side of the Atlantic, Edgar Allen Poe was reimagining the genre in such tales as *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) and *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843). And in Britain, Charles Dickens was appropriating the Gothic tradition for his own stories; the conventions of the Gothic were to loom particularly large in late works such as *Bleak House* (1852) and *Great Expectations* (1860), but it was in a series of Christmas stories that he first explored the genre fully. *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846) and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848) are now forgotten by popular culture, but the first, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), continues to be read by millions and has been the subject of dozens of film adaptations.

Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* primarily to expose the horrors of real-world injustice, but he chose to hang his social commentary on a literary framework owing much to Gothic horror. It is easy to forget that in genre terms, the tale of Scrooge is primarily a ghost story; it was originally subtitled *A Ghost Story of Christmas*. Its role in enshrining the traditional Victorian Christmas—trees, holly, candles and carols—has meant many who know the story only through other media forget that it is, at least partly, horror.

Certainly Dickens narrates *A Christmas Carol* with tongue firmly in cheek at times. He prefaced the 1843 edition of the book quite whimsically:

> I HAVE endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it [from the saying "to lay the ghost to rest"].

The story itself begins with death, but the author treats it with a large dose of gallows humour. "Marley was dead: to begin with," he writes, before a humorous diversion as he muses on why the simile is "dead as a doornail" rather than "dead as a coffin-nail." But after this almost-silly—if macabre—opening, Dickens sets the scene outside Scrooge's London offices some seven years after Marley's death. Far from being a picture of cheery, greeting-card festivity, the scene is gloomy and

haunting. No snow, no children playing, no Christmas carols. It is dark, and the fog—in fact a mostly industrial London smog—is so thick, the houses across the narrow street have become "mere phantoms."

Ebenezer Scrooge is described in almost non-human terms: He exists in his own atmosphere, carrying "his own low temperature always about with him"; blind men's dogs recognize him and try to warn their masters; Scrooge has the "evil eye" of ancient folklore. Nature itself is described in decidedly preternatural terms: "To see the dingy cloud come drooping down … one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale."

Dickens's prose is littered with Gothic elements. There are shadows, flickering candles and dingy streets; there are Scrooge's gloomy chambers, echoey and empty of humanity. One particularly curious Gothic reference is when the miser declares that everyone who wishes another a merry Christmas should be "boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart," a curse that evokes both cannibalism and vampirism. *Dracula* was not yet written, but vampires were already firmly in the public imagination through works such as John Polidori's *The Vampyre*. The imagery is certainly intended to be dryly humorous, but the modern reader easily overlooks how grisly it was. (Much too close-to-the-bone for Dickens's audience at some points. For example, when Scrooge tells his nephew words to the effect of "I'll see you in hell first," Dickens can't even bring himself to mention hell, referring to it euphemistically as "that other extremity.")

With his dark, shadowy images of a fogbound London, Dickens has established a Gothic atmosphere long before we arrive on the doorstep of his house, where he first sees the image of his deceased business partner, Jacob Marley, in place of his doorknocker. The author describes the vision in terms that are as bizarre as they are wonderfully ethereal. Marley had a "dismal light" around him, "like a bad lobster in a dark cellar." It was a face of "horror" and "livid colour," and the wide-eyed ghost's "hair was curiously stirred as if by breath or hot air."

Once inside, Scrooge speaks face-to-face with the ghost, who has come to warn him of an impending visitation by three spirits. The narrative of this encounter is terrifying indeed:

> At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Film adaptations have not always succeeded in translating these details to the screen. In 1938, a Hollywood version that suffers from far too much whimsy and a disappointingly cartoonish portrayal of Scrooge (Reginald Owen), the chance for something genuinely frightening or haunting is squandered by uninspired direction and a banal performance by Leo G Carroll, an otherwise-fine character actor whose skeletal features might have seemed ideal for the role of a ghost. Even the 1935 version managed a more effective atmosphere in these scenes, despite not showing Jacob Marley at all. Three portrayals that really work, however, are those of Michael Hordern (1951), delightfully camp but accompanied by truly chilling shrieks; Frank Finlay (1984), who manages a literal jaw-dropping in comic but macabre fashion, and without the help of special effects; and Gary Oldman (voice only) in 2009. In this decidedly scary latter version, CGI-animated and produced by Disney, Marley's jaw literally hangs from its hinges as if on a decaying corpse.

Horrors of Injustice

Dickens masterfully blends the twin horrors of the story's Gothic, ghost-story elements and the injustices of Victorian society. As Marley's visit comes to an end, for example, the sky is filled with moaning phantoms in chains, but an equal horror is one spectre's piteous wailing at "being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step." The phantoms' misery, writes Dickens, was in wanting to help others, which they had never done in life, but realizing they had forfeited such power forever.

One particularly effective moment of Victorian social horror will come later, when the Spirit of Christmas Present opens his robes to reveal two children, Ignorance and Want. In their "wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable" state, they have become so animal-like, Scrooge mistakes their hands for claws. Dickens describes it vividly thus:

> They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Disney's 2009 version of the story stands out for making much of this scene. In a nightmarish sequence that takes place in the shadow of a chiming clock, Ignorance is transformed into a knife-wielding, caged lunatic—Dickens's book referred earlier to Bedlam, London's infamous insane asylum—while Want becomes a prostitute who is strait-jacketed and dragged away by invisible hands.

Scrooge and the Numinous

Ebenezer Scrooge's ghostly encoun-

Alastair Sim as *Scrooge* (1951)

ters exhibit another common element of Gothic fiction, namely an experience of what philosopher and theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) later called "the numinous." In his seminal work *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), he described the numinous as an experience of fear and fascination, dread and awe, such as that of encountering a deity. The effects of this mysterium tremendum include trembling, or shuddering ("grauens" in the original German). In discussing the manifestation of the numinous in culture, Otto linked it explicitly to ghost stories:

> But even when [the numinous emotion] has reached its higher and purer mode of expression it is possible for the primitive types of excitation that were formerly a part of it to break out in the soul in all their original naïveté and so to be experienced afresh. That this is so shown by the potent attraction exercised again and again exercised by the element of horror and 'shudder' in ghost stories, even in persons of high all-round education. It is a remarkable fact that the physical reaction to which this unique 'dread' of the uncanny gives rise is also unique, and is not found in the case of any 'natural' fear or terror.

Scrooge's three visitations increasingly display aspects of the numinous. When visited by the Spirit of Christmas Past, Scrooge finds its light so overwhelming, he eventually causes its departure by seizing on its extinguisher-cone (a feature not often seen in film versions) and literally snuffing out its flame-like existence. Dickens's description of this spirit feels almost Lovecraftian:

> Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was not its strangest quality. … [The] figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever.

Scrooge's response to meeting the Spirit of Christmas Present is to hang his head and look upon him "reverently." But it is the third encounter, with the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come, that is accompanied by a classic experience of the numinous. By its mere presence, the ghost seems to "scatter gloom and mystery" in the air around it, causing Scrooge to bend down on his knee. He cannot see the spirit more than vaguely in the darkness, but he senses it is "tall and stately" beside him:

> Its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved. … Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.
>
> But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to

Disney's *A Christmas Carol* (2009)

the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

A Christmas Carol: The Films

Has any film come close to recreating the Gothic atmosphere of Dickens's novella? The first sound version of the film, in 1935 (starring Seymour Hicks, who had already played the role in a 1913 silent, *Old Scrooge*), boasts perhaps the most effective opening, with an atmosphere perfectly capturing the dingy, almost-depressing air imagined by the author. The street outside Scrooge's office, with snow on the ground, and fog, but no cheery, pretty snowflakes to create a picture-postcard scene, is bleak and claustrophobic. A small band of musicians plays the *The First Nowell*—badly. It sounds more like a funeral dirge than a Christmas carol, but the groaning notes perfectly suit the sombre setting.

The 1951 film—by far the most popular version, due mainly to a very memorable starring turn by Alastair Sim—achieves a sublime Gothic feel, thanks largely to the black-and-white cinematography of C Pennington-Richards. Never is this better-seen than in the image of Scrooge kneeling before the "spectral hand" of the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come; the many layers of light, creating stark shadows and contrasts, give the image an astonishing depth. . (A hideously colourized version from 1989 robs the film of virtually all its visual power.) The film's grimness may well explain why it flopped on its original American release, but it is testament to its faithfulness to the Gothic tradition.

The 1984 TV version, directed by Clive Donner, is also of note for an earnest attempt to accentuate darker elements of the tale. It's also one of the few versions to be shot largely on location. The Shropshire town of Shrewsbury stands in for Victorian London, lending the film a pleasing authenticity; visitors can still see Scrooge's gravestone, specially created for the film, in the churchyard of St Chad's today.

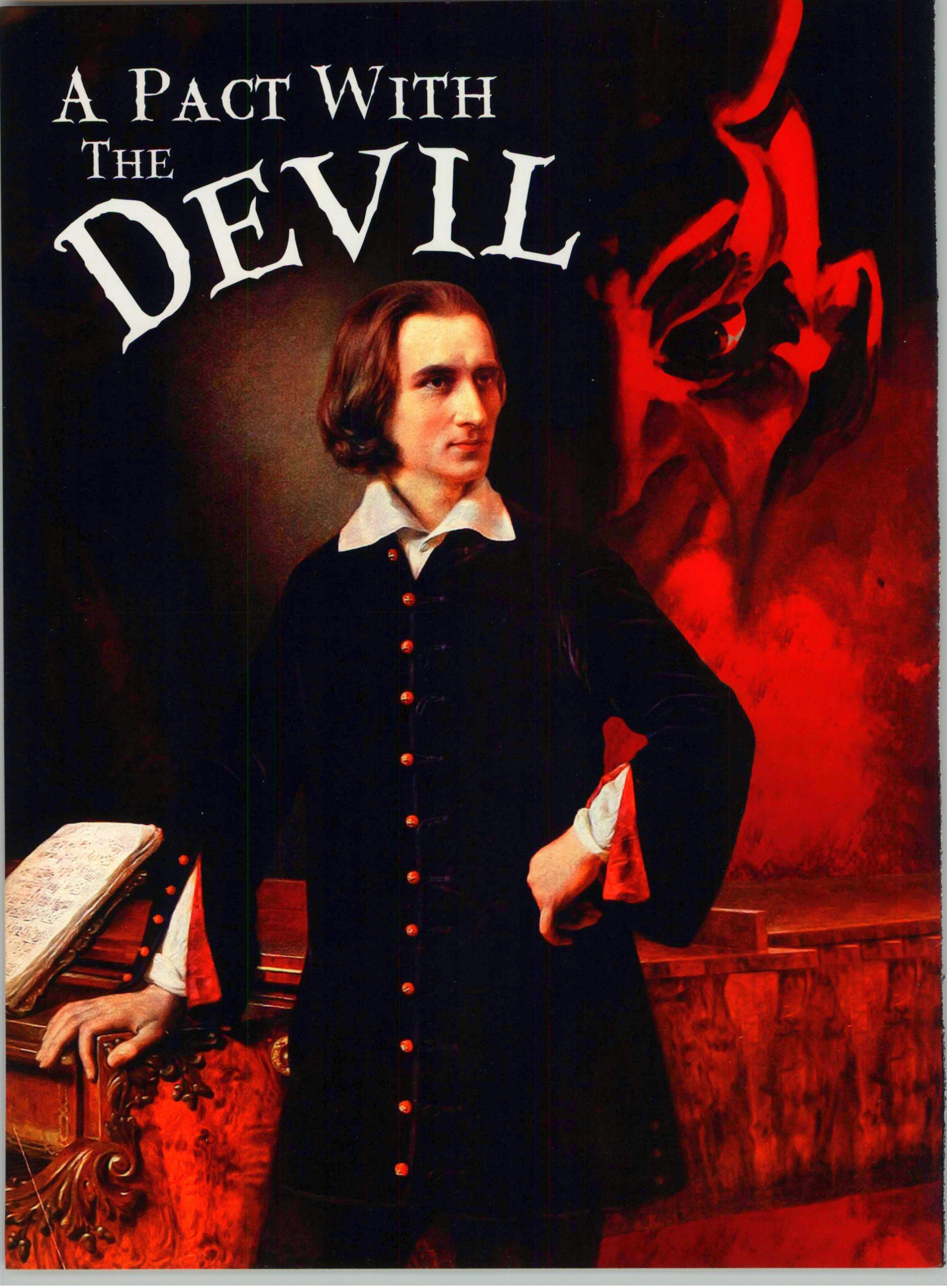
Disney's *A Christmas Carol* (2009) deserves a mention for being one of the few versions to go for actual scares—including decidedly modern "jump scares"—rather than purely atmosphere. The early scenes, such as that of Marley's visitation, are executed fairly effectively, but they're surely too scary for the film's juvenile target audience. Unfortunately, the filmmakers later try to accommodate all ages by adding some very out-of-place slapstick action, including an arbitrary extended chase sequence featuring a shrunken Scrooge. By the time the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come arrives, the film is a bit of a mess.

Perhaps no cinematic version has truly matched Dickens's original, but that's unsurprising, for the author's prose has a chilling and equally wry way of articulating the Gothic. How can any celluloid image hope to rival such literary descriptions as "like a bad lobster in a dark cellar" and a spirit that is "now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body"? *A Christmas Carol* is a work of singular humour and atmosphere, and, as Dickens himself wished, may no one wish to lay its ghost to rest.

by David L. Rattigan

'I am about to raise your salary!'

A Pact With The DEVIL



David L Rattigan explores the diabolical world of Franz Liszt's *Faust Symphony*, two centuries after the Hungarian composer's birth.

THE PIECE WAS years in the making. Liszt began preliminary sketches for the *Faust Symphony* in the 1840s, but he was hindered by a busy concert schedule—and besides, his attitude to Goethe, the most famous of all the authors ever to commit the story of Faust to print, was ambivalent. Like Faust, Liszt was divided, at one point saying he would rather take "the worst Jesuit" than all of Goethe's work. But the influence of the Faustian legend crept upon him, first when he conducted Robert Schumann's *Scenes from Goethe's Faust* in 1849, the hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth, and then in 1852, when he conducted *The Damnation of Faust*, by his friend Hector Berlioz, the French composer. Berlioz was effectively the father of programme music, an innovation of the Romantic period where music was used to tell or illustrate extra-musical stories. He pioneered the form with the *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), a massive orchestral work narrating the tale of an artist driven to despair by unrequited love; he tries to kill himself with opium, but it instead sends him into a realm of nightmarish visions.

Intrigued by the story of Faust and by the music of Schumann and Berlioz before him, Liszt penned the majority of the *Faust Symphony* in late 1854, in a fit of inspiration. He lived in Weimar at that time, and he had visited many sites connected with Goethe, a famous native of the German city, including the late poet's tomb. His interest in the subject was further stimulated by a visit from the English novelist George Eliot and her companion, George Henry Lewes, who was conducting research for a Goethe biography. For the symphony, rather than depicting a linear narrative, Liszt composed three *Charakterbilden* or "character portraits," describing the characters of Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles—the Devil—in musical form.

The legend of Faust has its roots in a real person, the 16th-century German alchemist and occultist Johann Georg Faust. The mythology that swiftly followed his death in c1540, has so little to do with the facts of his life, however, that some scholars have suggested the source of the story is another person altogether. In any case, the folk tale based on his name is evidently a highly embellished myth. In the most basic version, Faust is an unfulfilled magician who sells his soul to the Devil. With the Devil's help, he seduces the beautiful Gretchen, but her purity and innocence ultimately save her from their

Lithograph by Eugène Delacroix for Goethe's *Faust*, 1828. Opposite page: Franz Liszt, portrait by Miklós Barabás, 1847

wiles. In the English playwright Christopher Marlowe's drama *Doctor Faustus* (published in 1604 but first performed some years earlier), the title character strikes a bargain with Mephistopheles out of a desire for power. He is eventually damned to hell. In Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's retelling (1808), the alchemist is, arguably, more sympathetic, eager for higher knowledge rather than raw power, and in the end he is saved. As in the biblical story of Job, the deal is instigated by God, who bets that Satan cannot tempt Faust away from him. It was on this version that the 19th-century Romantics, including Liszt, based their musical interpretations. (Frenchman Charles Gounod based his 1859 opera only indirectly on Goethe, via the lesser-known play by Michel Carré, who co-wrote the libretto for Gounod.)

Liszt suffered intense depression, sometimes to the point of feeling suicidal, and this darker aspect of his life no doubt influenced the dark themes in his work, despite his devout Roman Catholicism. His other major programmatic symphony, the *Dante Symphony*, is based on Dante's vivid portrayal of Hell and Purgatory in *The Divine Comedy* (1856). He also wrote four *Mephisto Waltzes*, between 1859 and his death in 1886; the first in this diabolical set is based on Nikolaus Lenau's *Faust* (1836). In 1865, living in a monastery in Rome following the deaths of two of his children, Liszt was ordained an abbé (a low-ranking clergyman) in the Catholic Church, prompting German historian Gregorovius to decry him as "Mephistopheles disguised as an abbé."

The first movement of the symphony opens with a simple but effective theme that both echoes the musical past and anticipates its future. Liszt uses the tritone—a chord of three notes, each spaced two tones apart, and not occurring naturally in a Western scale. This chord had been known since at least the previous century as *diabolus in musica* (the Devil in music). But as well as echoing historic diabolical associations, the theme, which continues across each of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale, looks ahead some seventy years to the advent of the atonal form of music known as serialism, the cacophonic (but mathematically rigorous) style first advanced by Arnold Schoenberg.

In this first movement, particularly, it's impossible to avoid hearing shades of future film music, including but by no means limited to horror scores. The ethereal effect of the violins as they soar upwards in the opening tritone passage is almost identical to a passage from the heavily Romantic James Bernard's score for the Hammer film *Dracula* (1958). As his biographer, David Huckvale, notes, the tritone was central to Bernard's music in general. Immediately following Liszt's twelve-tone row is a response by the first oboe and clarinets, again virtually identical, both in the harmony and the orchestration, to a passage from later film music, this time Bernard Herrmann's score to Hitchcock's black comedy *The Trouble with Harry* (1954). The earthy, swirling, descending "passion" theme in this *Faust* movement will later be echoed by the "Flowers of Fire" cue from Bernard Herrmann's score to *Fahrenheit 451* (1966, directed by Francois Truffaut). This author unmistakably heard Franz Waxman and John Williams at various points, too. There's much truth to David Malvinni's

Gustave Doré, illustration for Dante's *Inferno*

This & opposite page: Lithograph by Eugène Delacroix for Goethe's *Faust*, 1828

claim that "the history of film music begins not with actual film music, but with Wagnerian music drama," and film music "presents the ultimate triumph of Liszt's and Wagner's philosophy."

The second movement ostensibly sketches the character of Gretchen, but Liszt subtly brings in themes from Faust's movement, suggesting perhaps that Gretchen is an aspect of Faust. It's a classic theme of the Gothic—the divided self—which we see in definitive Gothic horror literature such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Hyde*, also works that centre on daring adventurers pursuing something beyond natural human knowledge.

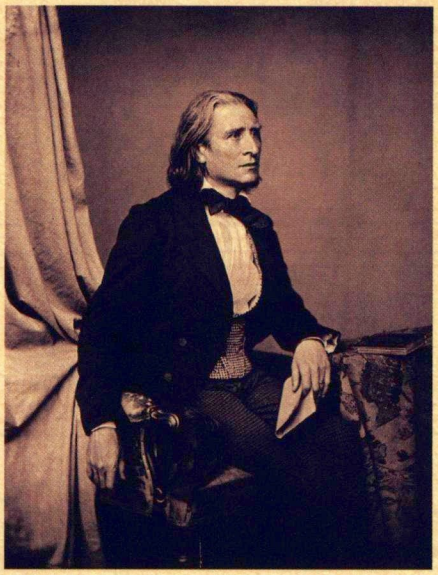
In the third movement, a blustery, epic portrayal of Mephistopheles, the themes from the first movement are again taken up and parodied, another suggestion of the divided self, but also a reflection of Goethe's (Christian) idea that Satan cannot create, only corrupt and destroy ("der Geist, der stets verneint"). As music historian Alan Walker writes,

> Liszt's solution [to portraying the Devil musically] is brilliant. He gives Mephistopheles no themes of his own, but allows him instead to penetrate those of Faust, which become distorted and cruelly mutated. … All Faust's themes—different aspects of his character [doubt, passion, love, pride]—are gradually drawn into the circle of Hell.

Liszt eventually revised his symphony to add a final *Chorus mysticus* making Faust's redemption explicit. Taking its text from Goethe, it ends with an ode to the Eternal Feminine: "The Woman-Soul leadeth us upwards."

The *Faust Symphony* was almost lost, thanks to an impish student of Liszt's, Carl Tausig. The mischievous young man sold some of Liszt's music to get pocket money, and *Faust* ended up in the hands of a wastepaper collector. The frantic Liszt's fortunes were saved by another of his students, Alexander Gottschalg, who tracked down the purchaser and bought back the score. Goethe's Gothic antihero returned in *Faust: The Second Part of the Tragedy* (1832, the year Goethe died); thanks to the quick-witted Gottschalg, Liszt's *Faust Symphony* too returned, redeemed, to play a part in setting the programme for generations of genre and symphonic music to come.

by David L Rattigan



Liszt in 1858 by Franz Hanfstaengl

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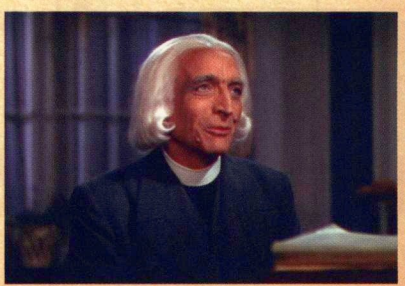
Liszt and Phantom of the Opera

Franz Liszt was to make an appearance in a horror film, as a character, in 1943. The film was Universal's *Phantom of the Opera*, directed by Arthur Lubin and starring Claude Rains in the title role. The prolific character actor Fritz Lieber—whose life (1882-1949) overlapped with that of Liszt (1811-1886)—played the composer, called in to the Paris Opera House to play a piano concerto written by the Phantom, Erique Claudin, whose would-be captors hope the music will lure him out of his underworld lair.

Edward Ward was brought in to compose the "concerto," which was later marketed in sheet music form as *Lullaby of the Bells*. There's a definite hint of the "passion" theme from the first movement of the *Faust Symphony* in the climactic passages of Ward's concerto.



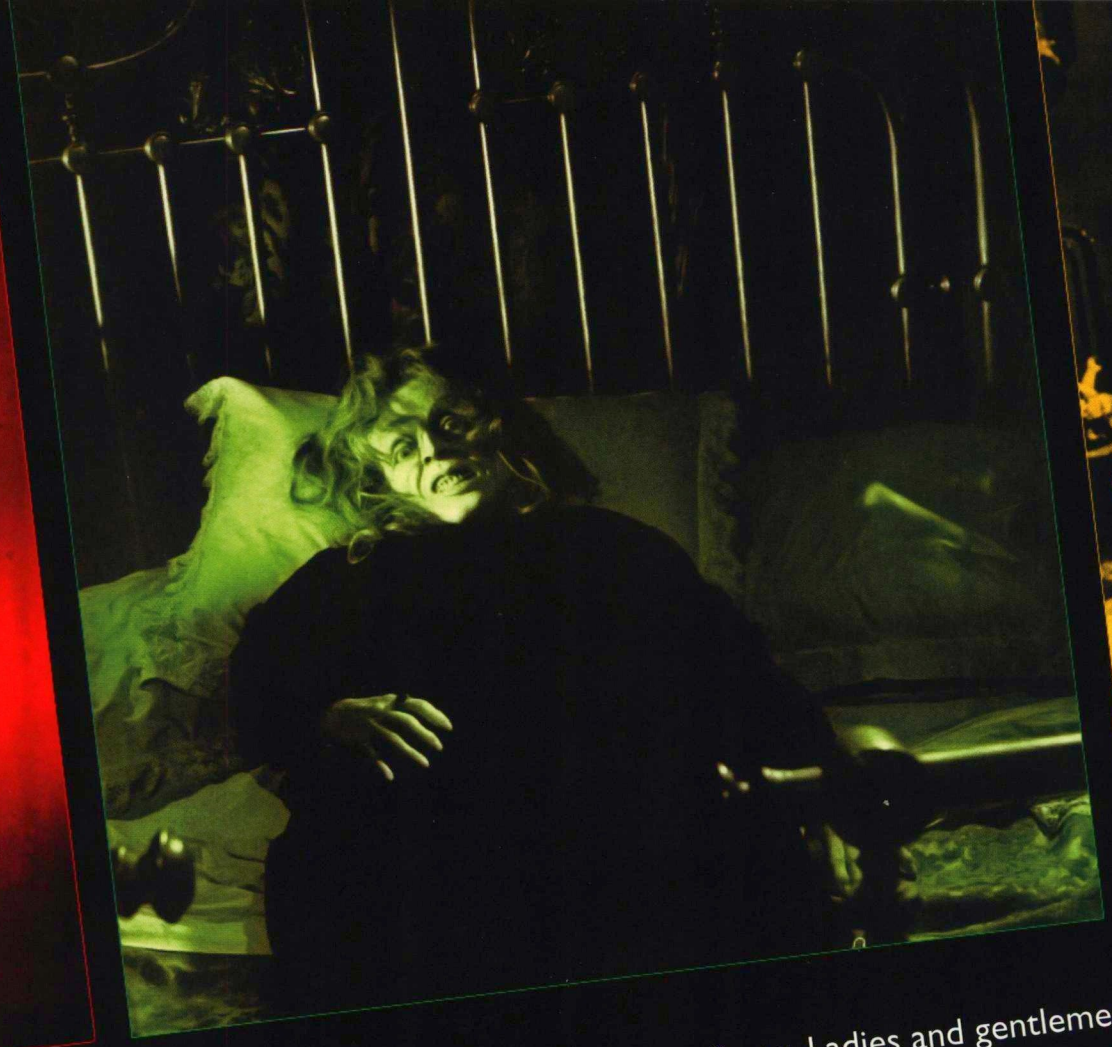
AN ENGLISHMAN'S GUIDE TO ITALIAN GOTHIC

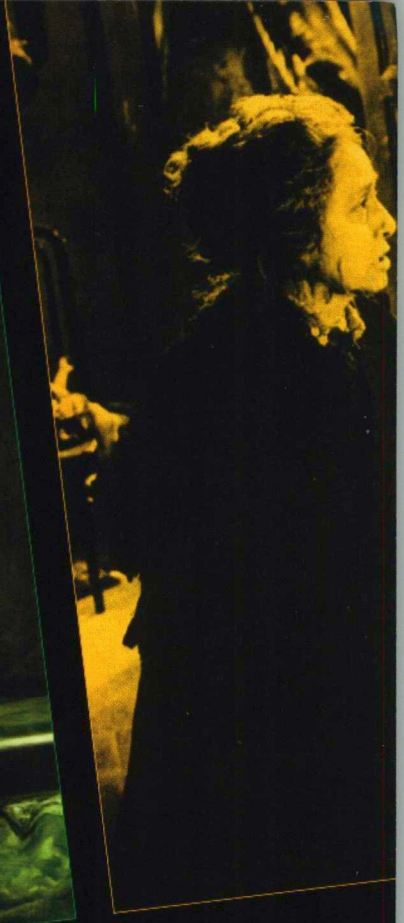
BORIS KARLOFF

IN

Black Sabbath

AT THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT





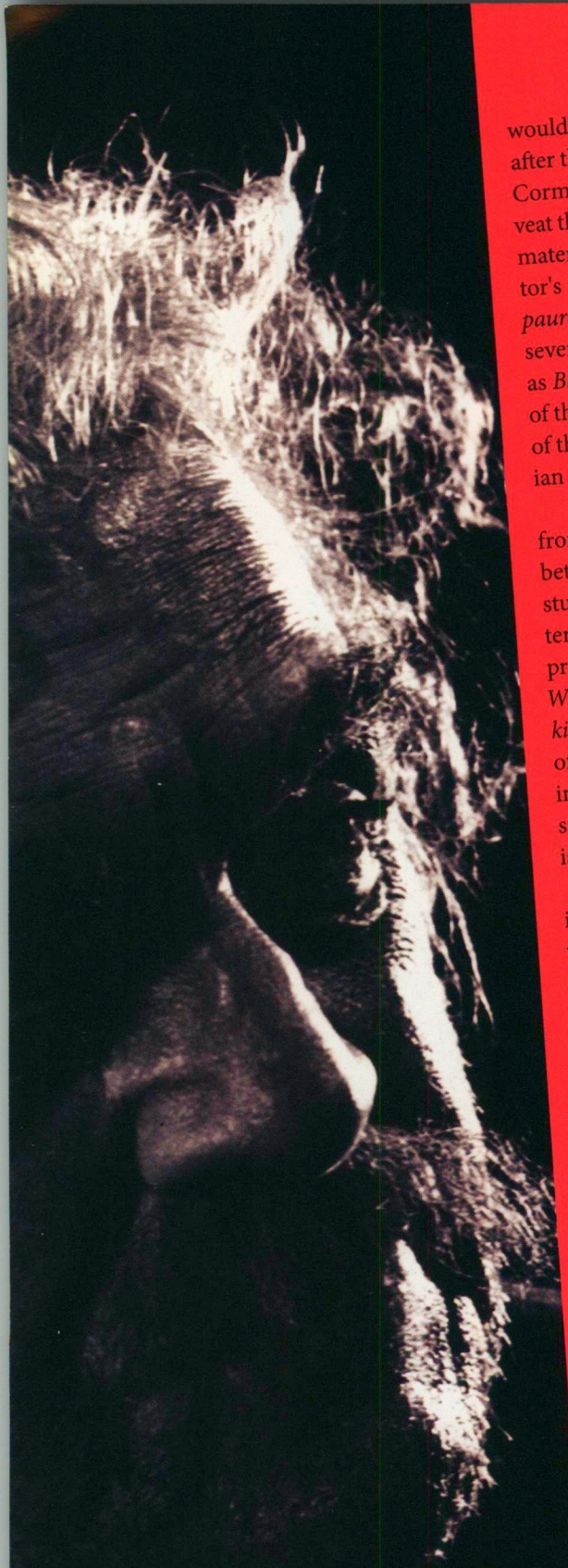
"Come closer, please. I have something to tell you. Ladies and gentlemen, I am Boris Karloff. Allow me to introduce three brief tales of terror and the supernatural. I hope you didn't come to the movies alone. As you will realize by watching this film, specters and vampires... are everywhere. There might be one sitting next to you! Yes, they go to the movies, too, I assure you."

- from Boris Karloff's introduction to *I tre volti della paura* (1963)

THE END OF 1962 saw director Mario Bava complete what is generally regarded, cautiously at least, as the first example of a whole new genre, the *giallo*. *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (*The Girl Who Knew Too Much*), released in the US as *The Evil Eye*, is a noirish, blackly comedic fable that sees Letícia Román visiting her aunt in Rome only to become embroiled in a murder mystery, which she eventually solves with the help of doctor John Saxon. What the film lacks in the script department is amply made up for by its look and feel: Bava's masterful use of light and shadow allied to stunning locations, a great score from Roberto Nicolosi and two likeable young leads.

Coming straight off that film, Bava was keen to get to work on another Gothic horror picture, it being two years since his international success with 1960's *Black Sunday*. The opportunity to do just that was afforded by American distributors AIP, who were equally keen to repeat that success and also wanting a vehicle for one of their star attractions—none other than the most famous horror actor in the world, Boris Karloff. It was decided that Bava's new excursion into the fantastique

Jacqueline Pierreux and Mario Bava



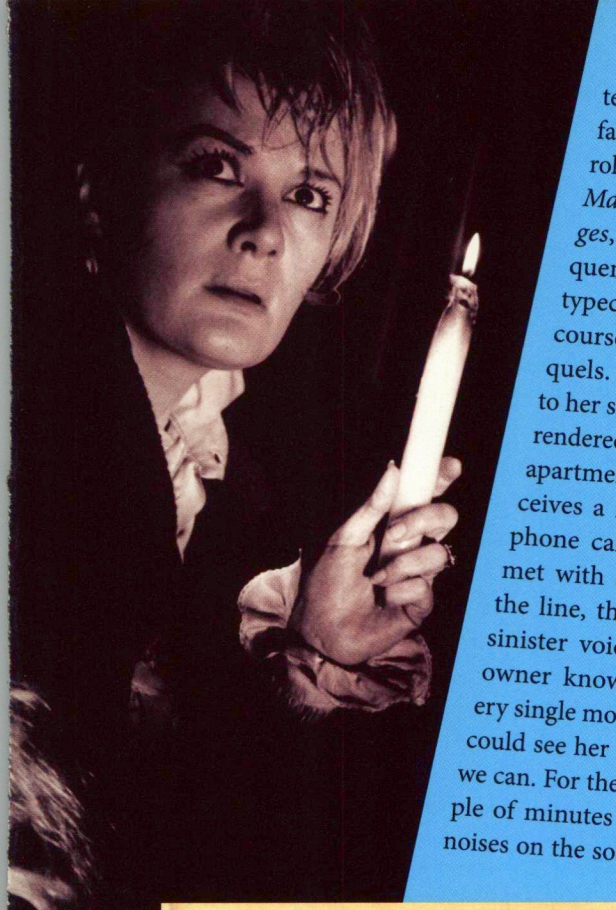
would be a three-part portmanteau film after the fashion of that year's AIP Roger Corman hit *Tales of Terror*, with the caveat that Bava steer clear of Poe for source material, as that was the American director's territory. The result, *I tre volti della paura* (*Three Faces of Fear*), released in a severely bowdlerized form in the States as *Black Sabbath*, would turn out be one of the best films of Bava's career and one of the crowning achievements of the Italian Gothic cycle.

Filming took place over eight weeks, from early February to late March 1963, between Cinecittà and Titanus Farnesina studios, with producers Salvatore Billitteri and Paolo Mercuri, the latter having previously collaborated with Bava on *Girl Who Knew Too Much* and *Fury of the Vikings* (1961). The creation of the three tales of terror to come is credited in the opening titles to "Čechov—Tolstoi—Maupassant" (sic), although, as we will see, this is not completely as it seems.

After the opening credits, the viewer is treated to a wonderful light-hearted introduction with Boris Karloff playing the horror host as he had done many times before on the '60-'62 series *Thriller*. Delivering his welcome from a purple soundstage-set mountainside (or, knowing Bava, probably some crinkled-up brown paper or papier-mâché in close-up, more than adequately representing same), lavender and red gels imbuing his face with otherworldly hues, in front of a swirling blue back projection, making it almost seem as though the actor is inhabiting some crazed Steve Ditko conception of "Limbo" from a sixties *Doctor Strange* comic. "But here I am chattering on and wasting time," he concludes. "So let's get on with our first tale."

"Il telefono" (*"The Telephone"*) is the first in the triptych, and the only of the stories to be set within a contemporary milieu. As it features a telephone as a prime focus, it seems highly unlikely to be based on the work of nineteenth-century author Guy de Maupassant, and, indeed, we find elsewhere a writer by the name of FG Snyder is credited. As there seems to be no-one in the annals of cinema history ever to have gone by that name, it's likely that Bava himself and/or script collaborator Alberto Bevilacqua came up with the story (the finished screenplay was by Marcello Fondato, who would later specialize in Bud Spencer comedies). However, in his audio commentary for the Anchor Bay DVD release of the film, Tim Lucas makes a convincing case for the tale finding its genesis in Maupassant's 1887 short story *"Le Horla,"* which involves a narrator plagued with an unknown entity "watching … looking at … dominating" him in his own home.

"Il telefono" charts the similar unease of Rosy, who it appears is some sort of high-class escort or call-girl, played by the stunning Michèle Mercier, who in the following year would shoot to in-



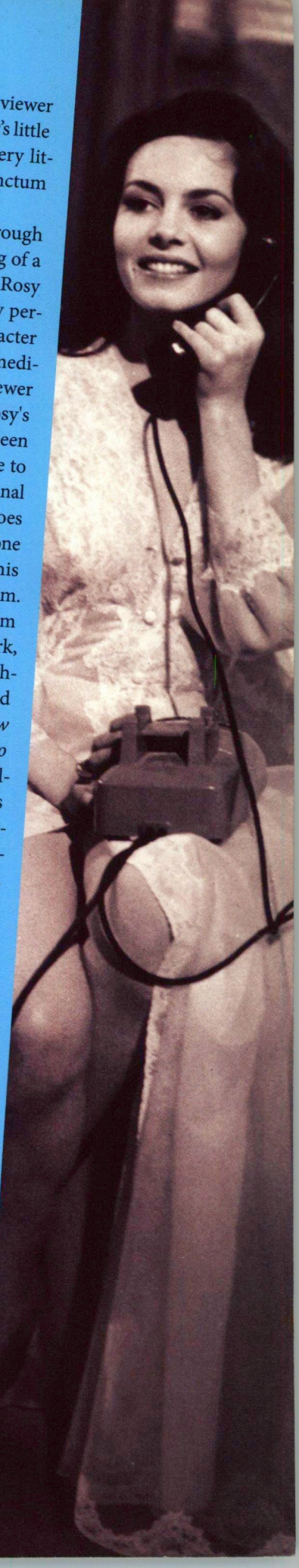
ternational fame in the title role of *Angélique, Marquis des Anges*, and subsequently become typecast over the course of four sequels. Returning to her sumptuously rendered open-plan apartment, Rosy receives a number of phone calls, at first met with silence on the line, then with a sinister voice, whose owner knows her every single move as if he could see her as well as we can. For the first couple of minutes the only noises on the soundtrack are the sounds of the phone's jangling ring and Mercier nervously intoning "Pronto... pronto!"

Apart from the odd occasion when she leaves the extended room, Rosy is in the main the sole focus of Bava and Ubaldo (*Black Sunday*) Terzano's roving, sweeping camera and, consequently, the viewer's undivided attention. In a series of long, unflinching takes, we watch her yawn and stretch, go into the bathroom, slip off her stockings, discard her little black dress, don a bathrobe—and start to display outward signs of rising panic as the phone calls escalate into death threats. This Hitchcockian trick makes the viewer complicit in the mysterious stalker's little game, doggedly observing her every little move in her supposed inner sanctum with him.

After a newspaper drops through her letterbox with a headline telling of a former lover's escape from prison, Rosy desperately makes a call to the only person she seems to know, Mary (character actress Lydia Alfonsi), for help. Immediately after it is revealed that to the viewer that it is in fact she, apparently Rosy's spurned lesbian lover, who has who been making the calls, as an elaborate ruse to get back into her life. However, in the final scene jailbird Frank (Milo Quesada) does indeed turn up, strangling Mary with one of Rosy's stockings before meeting his end when Rosy succeeds in stabbing him.

With a slinky, jazz-based score from Roberto Nicolosi, bravura camerawork, and resplendent in lurid, saturated Technicolor, *"Il telefono"* is stylish, sexy and contemporary; if *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* planted the seeds of the *giallo* genre (along with, of course, the still-popular Edgar Wallace krimi thrillers from Germany's Rialto Films and others), then this mini-masterpiece defined the way in which it would flower. It set out the textures and hues that would characterize its palette, visually and aurally. And, as Tim Lucas has pointed out, it provided the visual tropes that would define Dario Argento's entire body of work.

We are next sent back into the realms of the more purely Gothic with *"I Wurdulak"* (*"The Wurdulak"*) which is no less sumptuously mounted. A dashing young Mark Damon (who had played a similar role in Corman's *House of Usher*, 1960) plays Count Vladimir d'Urfe, whose journey across the nineteenth-century Russian countryside is interrupted by his discovery of a man's body with its head missing and a dagger in its back. He soon learns that the dead man was a "Wurdulak," a "bloodthirsty corpse" who "yearns for the blood of those he loved most when he was alive," and that the dagger belonged to Gorca (Karloff), the patriarch of the household Vladimir finds



himself in, who had five days earlier set out to catch the monster and has not yet returned.

Doubtful of this story, Vladimir decides to spend the night at the family's cottage, thanks mainly to the charms of the young Sdenka (Susy Andersen) rather than anything else (in the best Italian genre movie tradition the two homely, rural wenches are flawlessly furnished with Anita Ekberg make-up and hair), and he learns that "those who kill them also become Wurdulaks." Gorca had said that if he returned after five days he would "not be himself"—and it comes as little surprise to the viewer that the five days are up "tonight, at the stroke of midnight." In a masterfully directed scene, we hear a distorted, funereal church bell announce the witching hour, and as the family nervously watch at the window, we are made party to Gorca's approach through the howling wind, first witnessing the hooded and cloaked figure shamble over a rope bridge, then with the camera panning along with his feet as they drag through the mud towards the cottage, before sweeping up to reveal the rest of a hulking, grizzled and wild-eyed Karloff.

Karloff gives one of the most terrifying performances of his career as Gorca. Particularly unnerving is the subsequent scene where, in the knowledge that Gorca is now driven to "feed on the blood of those he loves best," we see him hold and pet his tiny grandson, Ivan (played by an unknown, uncredited, child actor). As he does this, we hear a gunshot signalling the death of the family dog, which Gorca, who had loved the dog in life, had just forcibly ordered his son to carry out to cease its constant howling. Later in the night, when most of the family are asleep, a panning shot of a bedroom reveals a long shadow appearing on the wall behind the sleeping child's bed, before we see Gorca carrying off the child with a disturbing, lascivious grin across his face.

However, surely the most chilling moment, and one of the most unnerving in Italian horror cinema, is where young Ivan returns and is heard, outside in the howling winds, crying "Mama, Mama. I'm cold," in an unearthly, echoing voice. Shot from a raised angle suggested the parents' view from their window, the boy

Michèle Mercier as Rosy

looks small and vulnerable, his face obscured by darkness and distance; the next shot of him is from behind, facing the house, knelt down with has arms outstretched to the door. Something about this, the disembodied voice, the hidden face, and the strange, fixed position, still has the power to chill. The boy's father, Pietro (Massimo Righi), soon finds out that blood is indeed thicker than water when the mother, Maria (Rika Dialina), fatally stabs him when he tries to prevent her from going out to him. As in *Black Sunday*, we're again seeing the family unit eat itself from the inside like a cancer.

It is known that Bava had a passion for Russian literature (in addition to being a voracious reader of those yellow-spined Edgar Wallace paperbacks), and true to the credits, this tale actually is by one of the classic authors cited—Tolstoy. Well, sort of. The story is based on the novelette *Sem'ya Vurdalaka* (*Семья вурдалака*, 1839), or *The Family of the Vourdalak*, by the *War and Peace* author's less famous brother, Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy. Compared to *Black Sunday's* almost in-name-only adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *Vij* (*Вий*, 1835), *"I Wurdulak"* is a great deal more faithful to its source material.

So what of 'Čechov, then, or Chekhov, as he's better known to readers of English? Final tale *"La goccia d'aqua"* (*"The Drop of Water"*), turns out to be based on a work not by Anton Pavlovich, as one might expect (and many still assume), but by one "Ivan Chekhov," another writer who doesn't appear to exist anywhere outside of Bava's wry sense of humor.

This story starts with another telephone call; in what appears to be fin-de-siècle London but could just as easily be Paris, Helen (Jacqueline Pierreux) is called away from a session with a bottle of whiskey, some sewing and her gramophone player (whose music ominously grinds to a discordant halt as she leaves) to prepare a freshly expired elderly patient for burial. When she at first beholds the hideous, distorted visage of the dead woman, in life a medium ("They say the spirits of the dead killed her. Ghosts!"), she is horrified, until her gaze avariciously fixes on the valuable-looking topaz ring on the corpse's claw-like finger.

When Helen has stolen the ring, knocking over a glass of water in the suspenseful process, a fly—that age-old symbol of impurity, temptation and corruption—suddenly appears on the finger of the dead woman. Returning to her shabby apartment, she finds herself plagued by not only the fly, but the persistent drip, drip of a faucet, inspiring her increasing terror until, in a horrifying moment, she is face to face with the dead woman herself, come to reclaim her property.

As in *"Il telefono,"* the protagonist's own home becomes a hostile, terrifying environment, made unfamiliar through Bava's masterful lighting of the segment. A blue light continuously pulses through an oval window to represent the storm outside, accompanied by purple and green hues of no discernible diegetic source, imbuing the darkened apartment with a sinister, otherworldly quality. The hideous appearance of the avenging medium, gliding towards Helen out of the darkness, is one of the most iconic and frighten-

Mario Bava directs Milo Quesada and Lidia Alfonsi in the strangulation scene

ing shots in Bava's entire body of work. The twisted face, surely more distorted and corrupted than any face could look so recently after death, was created by Mario's veteran father Eugenio Bava, as was the severed head of the Wurdulak "Alibeq," pulled out of a bag by Karloff in the previous tale.

Whilst certainly more EC Comics than Chekhov, *"The Drop of Water"* is still a strong note to end on, leaving us with a close-up of Helen's grimacing face, her dead eyes staring out at the viewer. However, after working the audience up into a state of terror, the final sequence lightens the tone. Karloff is on horseback in full Gorca regalia once more, but this time it is as himself to deliver an outro in which he warns the viewer to "watch out on the way home"—before the camera pulls back to reveal the studio set with a prop horse and several stage hands gleefully running around with branches to emulate the horse's movement. This fun, fourth-wall-breaking little coda must surely have sent contemporary European audiences walking out of cinemas with big smiles on their faces.

However, English-speaking audiences saw a very different version of the film than European audiences did. AIP were concerned that some of the material was too dark and adult in tone for the mostly juvenile audiences that were flocking in droves to the Corman Poe adaptations, so the version bearing their title, *Black Sabbath* (in an obvious bid to repeat the success of *Black Sunday*), is a very different experience. The stories were re-ordered—*Black Sabbath* starts with *"The Drop of Water,"* followed by *"The Telephone"* and *"The Wurdulak"*—and Karloff filmed new introductions to each tale, appearing either as a disembodied head against a black background or in a forest, with producer Salvatore Billitteri. What's more, the story of *"The Telephone"* was drastically altered to remove anything hinting at a lesbian subtext and also transform it into a ghost story. The scene where the newspaper telling of Frank's release arrives is doctored to show a ghostly letter seeming to write itself. As with *Black Sunday* and *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* before it, Roberto Nicolosi's excellent score was replaced by a more generic one by Les Baxter (*House of Usher*).

Although this is the version most familiar to American audiences of a certain vintage, the Italian version is vastly superior in every aspect but one: the price to pay for seeing the film in the Italian language is that one forfeits the pleasure of hearing Karloff's dulcet tones. American and British fans could not enjoy the authentic version until relatively recently, in 2001, when Image released it on a Region 1 DVD that revealed the film's true beauty. Although very much a film of its genre, it certainly cannot be dismissed as "trash," as many mainstream critics would probably like to. Although he himself would have most certainly denied it, Bava here shows the artistry of a Fellini or a Visconti; a master craftsman at the epicentre of the creative flowering of sixties Italian cinema. It is a classic not just of the horror film, but of world cinema.

Of course, by 1963, Bava now had competition that he didn't have with *Black Sunday*, with numerous other Italian directors cranking out Gothic horrors at a rate of knots. Another strong example of the genre from the same year, *The Virgin of Nuremberg*, was helmed by one Antonio Margheriti, who would use the Gothic form in his own way to push the boundaries of screen terror.

by Robyn Talbot

Italian two-folio poster for *Black Sabbath* (1963)

LA WARNER BROS. PRESENTA
I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA
BORIS KARLOFF · MARK DAMON · MICHELE MERCIER
SUSY ANDERSEN · LIDIA ALFONSI
GLAUCO ONORATO · MASSIMO RIGHI · MILLY MONTI · GUSTAVO DE NARDO
E CON JACQUELINE PIERREUX
REGIA DI
MARIO BAVA
EASTMANCOLOR - SCHERMO PANORAMICO
UNA CO-PRODUZIONE
ITALO FRANCESE
LYRE, PARIGI
EMMEPI-GALATEA
ROMA
WARNER BROS.
Vecchioni & Guadagno. Via del Casale de Merode, 8 - Roma - Agosto 1963
art director FARMIGIANI - artist Simeoni
AVVERTENZA

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David Kleiler is a veteran of over 30 years in the independent film industry. He is the co-founder of the Boston Underground Film Festival, Artistic Director of the Woods Hole Film Festival, Chairman of the Board & Chief Advisor to the Northampton Film Festival, creatively involved with the New Haven and Nantucket Film Festivals and receives a credit for the Journey into Madness Program at the Toronto Film Festival. He is a former tenured professor of Communications at Babson College, and has also taught film at Emerson College, U Mass Boston, Tufts University and the Boston Architectural Center.

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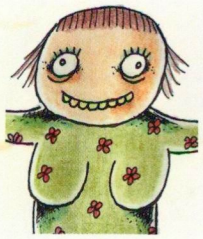
Rob Talbot is a regular contributor to *'superblog' 'Italian Film Review'* and UK-based print horror film magazine *Scream*. He maintains his own blog, *'Mondo Euro'*, while finishing his first horror novel somewhere between the cracks. Holding a first class degree in English Literature, he works by day, and often night too, as Events and Marketing Co-ordinator for a busy arts venue (with adjoining real ale pub) where he has also recently started hosting screenings of Eurocult gems like *A Bay of Blood* and *Torso*. He owns so many DVDs, CDs, books and film magazines that there is scarcely enough room for his wife and two young children.

Trevor Denham is a California-based illustrator specializing in pen and ink drawings. He received a BFA from Ringling College and his work has appeared in *Mad Monster* and *Monsterpalooza* magazines. He has created creatures, story boards, and graphic novels for Glass Eye Pix, Wild Sky Studios, and House of Diggs.



Janne Karlsson is a Swedish cartoonist and illustrator. His website is http://www.svenskapache.se

When the Moon is Full the Legend Comes to Life...

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ICONS of HORROR

The Omen

(1976)

SOME OF THE best images work because of their simplicity, and the original poster campaign for The *Omen* is just that—simple and effective. We are of course heavy with expectation when we go to the film today, such is the reputation that precedes it.

A small boy stands in silhouette, a light source highlighting his slight frame. He casts a long shadow on the ground in front of him. That shadow is in the shape of a cross, or rather as the viewer looks on, an inverted cross—a symbol of ultimate evil. There is something obscene about this boy.

The image is a masterclass in economy. The blend of black and white and red already presents us with an ominous foreshadowing, and as if we didn't know, the lettering for the film title also insert a little '666' into the O of 'Omen'—the mark of the beast laid bare.

Like everything else about Richard Donner's original, the 2006 remake borrowed this image wholesale for the new generation, though in a monochromatic black and red, which lacks a certain class. If it ain't broke, don't fix it (or remake it!).

The 1976 campaign also includes a variation which includes the boy Damien's parents (Lee Remick and Gregory Peck) looking shocked above his image, and the shadow cast by the boy is in the shape of a jackal—a large demonic looking dog.

We have been warned, the poster alone ensuring that. We are warned that children cannot always be trusted, and in something innocent lies the potential for something more horrifying than anything we can imagine.

by Robert J.E. Simpson

How you can become a part of *Diabolique* and Horror Unlimited Letters

The editor welcomes correspondence from readers of Diabolique. Submissions for the letters page should be emailed to robert@horrorunlimited.com with 'Letters' in the subject line. All emails will be considered for publication, and may be edited.

Subscribers can also leave feedback via the comments function on the website, and via the new HorrorUnlimited online forum (see www.horrorunlimited.com for details)

Submissions

Diabolique welcomes unsolicited submissions for publication in the magazine and website. *Diabolique* promises to push our understanding of horror, and is particularly concerned with Gothic film and literature. We will consider submissions that expand our understanding of any aspect of horror, or that deal with seemingly well-worn subjects in a new and interesting way.

In the first instance we recommend you contact the editor with an outline of your proposal, and where appropriate an example of your writing. Full draft submissions are also welcome, and we will promptly acknowledge receipt and advise you whether we wish to take it forward.

Essays should be submitted via email in a Word or Rich Text Format attachment document. Unless previously agreed, your submissions should not have been published elsewhere—either online or in print. At the time of going to press (March 2011), *Diabolique* does not as a rule pay for articles. A submission to the magazine confirms your willingness to allow a 12 month exclusivity on any article from date of publication.

We at *Diabolique* take issues of plagiarism very seriously. By submitting you also confirm that the material is your own original work, and you indemnify *Diabolique* and Horror Unlimited, the editors and publishers from any loss or expense incurred in the event of legal action arising from any offence.

Whilst not an academic publication, *Diabolique* encourages scholarly practices and approaches to the genre, and as such all sources should be referenced using numbered endnotes. The editor believes in the principles of good historical research, not tabloid journalism! For fuller guidelines please examine the contents of this issue, or email the editor.

Feature articles should be around 3,000 words, though we will consider longer articles by prior arrangement. Shorter articles should be around 1500—2000 words. Reviews should be between 500 and 1000 words. Fiction submissions can be of any length, but submissions over 5000 words may need to be edited or serialised.

All submissions should be accompanied by a short paragraph about the author (see the magazine for examples), and a photograph should be supplied.

Diabolique reserves the right to edit any submission to suit the needs of the magazine, including issues of presentation, style, and space. As a rule the authors will be consulted on any matters of alteration or addition, but in the event of a dispute the decision of the editors is final.

Illustrations

Authors are asked to provide photographs and/or illustrations for their work –including appropriate captions and references- or suggest where they may be obtained. The editors reserve the right to adapt, edit or commission artwork they feel would suit the presentation. Illustrative material should ideally be at 300dpi and sent as jpg or TIFF files.

Other Media

We are keen to see contributors explore the subject of horror through any means possible. Feel free to submit work in other formats, including illustrations, photography, video and anything else that takes your fancy. Work that cannot be published in the hard-copy magazine will be considered for publication on the Horror Unlimited website.

Please send all submissions and enquiries to the editor (Robert Simpson) at robert@horrorunlimited.com, with 'submission' in the subject line.

ISSUE 9

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THE DEVIL INSIDE and the phenomena of micro-budgeted, hand held, shot-on-video shockers; Robin Hardy's long-awaited sequel to his cult classic, THE WICKER MAN; David Del Valle's previously unpublished interview with director, Sidney Hayers; Ken Russell's THE DEVILS; writer and occultist, Montague Summers; HAXAN and the witchcraft documentary phenomenon; plus all your usual favorites from the *Diabolique* team.

DENHAM